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MAGAZINE

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by FAN NICHOLS

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THIS COFFEE IS WONDERFUL!
WHEN YOU FEEL UP TO IT, WE'LL HEAD FOR MY STATION AND RADIO TO HEADQUARTERS
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LATER AT HEADQUARTERS
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# NEW LOVE MAGAZINE

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PEGGY GRAVES
*Editor*

ALL STORIES NEW

VOL. 27 MAY, 1950 NO. 2

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ONLY TOMORROW ..... Fan Nichols 14
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JUNE ISSUE—OUT MAY 3rd

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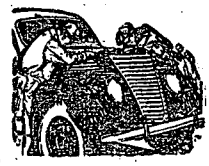

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It all began at Hartville City Hospital, where pretty Shelly considered herself just one of the nurses who had a job to do. When Louis Harrison, the famed plastic surgeon, notorious for his bachelor charm and suavity, was called in on a special case, Shelly didn't bother to compete with the others for his attention. And, as you know, those are always the ones who get the prize—just as Shelly got Louis by attending to her duties, until in no time at all Louis started to fence his world around her.

Louis chose her immediately from the bevy of glamorous nurses, and after sweeping her into a world brushed by stardust and moonbeams he told her that she was the living image of the composite picture he'd conjured up of his own dream girl—except for one little

*(Continued on page 8)*



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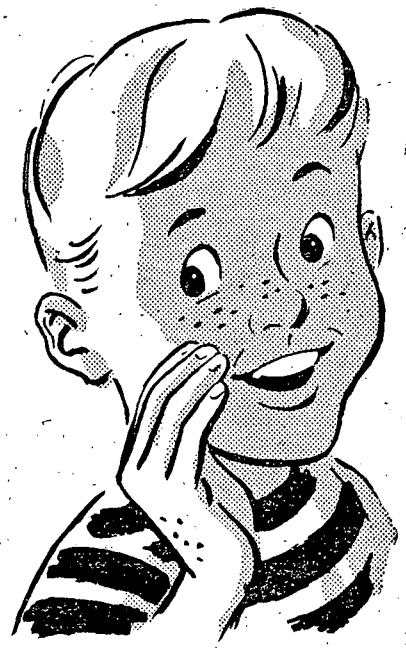

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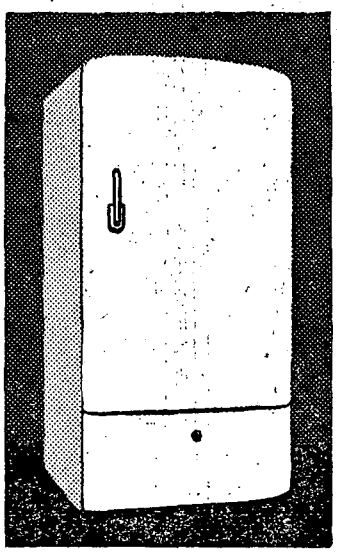

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*(Continued from page 6)*

thing: her nose. He'd sketched a picture of his ideal, and but for the patrician, slightly tip-tilted nose it was the exact likeness of Shelly. He asked her to be his fiancée, and to grant him the one small favor of letting him remodel her nose to conform to the picture so that his dream girl would come to life in every detail. Because she wanted to please Louis, Shelly readily agreed.

That was when she arrived in Bransford, Louis' home town, and was caught in Kirk Dixon's volcanic embrace. That was the first of the strange series of events, which were continued in a wave of turned heads and shocked expressions at the sight of lovely Shelly.

When she finally learned the reason for the townspeople's strange behavior, she learned it with a kiss that assured her that she'd accepted a substitute for love from Louis, and worse—that she'd surrendered her heart to Kirk in that kiss. And Kirk was in love with Christine Abbott, the girl Louis patterned Shelly after until she'd become a mirror image. For the shocking truth was that Christine was Louis' ex-fiancée, and when she'd broken their engagement because of his unfaithfulness to her, he modeled Shelly into a perfect likeness so that he could flaunt her before Christine, and so get her back on his own terms. The catch was that Louis, in his arrogance, knew that Christine still loved him, and he was willing to try every trick to accomplish this end—but only for revenge. Because Shelly knew now, as did everyone else except Christine, that Louis could never love anyone but himself.

You'll thrill to the story of Shelly St. Claire, in BEAUTIFUL STRANGER, Karen Cookson's complete novel for June NEW LOVE. Look for it at your favorite newsstand on May 3rd. Why not reserve your copy today?

Until then,

Sincerely,

Peggy Graves



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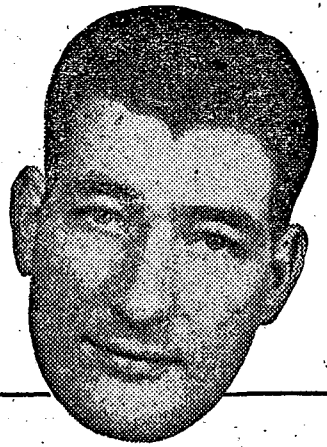

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# Love Came In

by Gladys Martin

*I searched for love*
*With bangled moons,*
*Spangled days*
*And turquoise noons,*

*Little candles*
*Like a star,*
*Incense in*
*A silver jar,*

*Scarlet roses*
*With a flare—*
*And then one night*
*When skies were bare*

*And dusk was worn*
*And gray and then*
*Love heard your laughter*
*And came in.*

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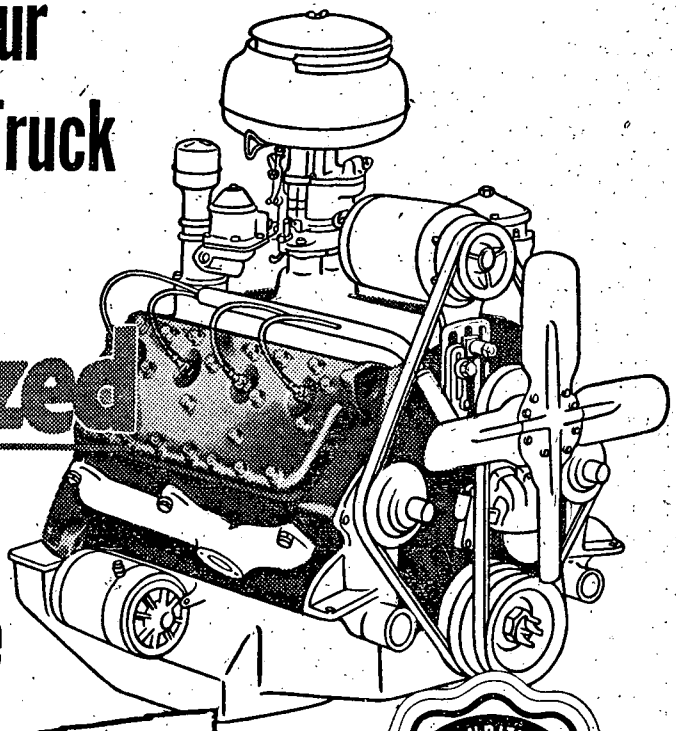

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# Your Pen Personality

By Mary Frances

**Here is a special and exciting feature, written exclusively for our NEW LOVE readers, by the famous Mary Frances, who will send you a personal analysis of your handwriting. Why not take advantage of this offer today? Simply write to her in care of NEW LOVE MAGAZINE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Send a self-addressed envelope with ten cents, and clip the coupon on page 113.**

MOVIELAND'S most glamorous grandmother, beautiful, youthful, Joan Bennett occupies our graphological place of honor this month. And her signature is just as graceful, just as understanding as the woman herself has turned out to be.

To most of the world Joan Bennett is a happy, healthy, wealthy, star. To those who know her, who have followed her, she was married at seventeen, a mother and a divorcée before she was twenty, married twice again and the mother of three more

daughters in the next twenty years. Between babies she had to make her way and followed the tradition of her stage-wise family. She had to fight nearsightedness which prevented her from recognizing friends across the room; she had to fight for her own personal rights, for her right to succeed as JOAN Bennett, not just the sister of Connie and Barbara, or the daughter of Richard.

Joan's signature has changed in the past ten years. It was smaller, more backhand, more pointed. The need to force herself no longer exists.

Trace her signature with your finger, or with a pencil. It has a natural rhythm, a pleasant swing to it, telling us that she has charm, rhythm, poise. The gracious capitals, coupled with the moderately large size and moderate slant indicate that she is a pleasant individual, affectionate, demonstrative, and has a genuine love of people. If your own writing shows the same signs you too have similar traits.

Why does she separate so many of her letters? Like many women she is intuitive, has that peculiar trait which is so much faster than logic, yet just as true. And why does she make the odd "e?" That is known as the Greek "e," the letter of refinement. Individuals found using this always have a liking for finer things, a feeling for music, an appreciation of art. They are not necessarily creative, but they are appreciative.

The unusual "J" reveals an interesting

*(Continued on page 112)*



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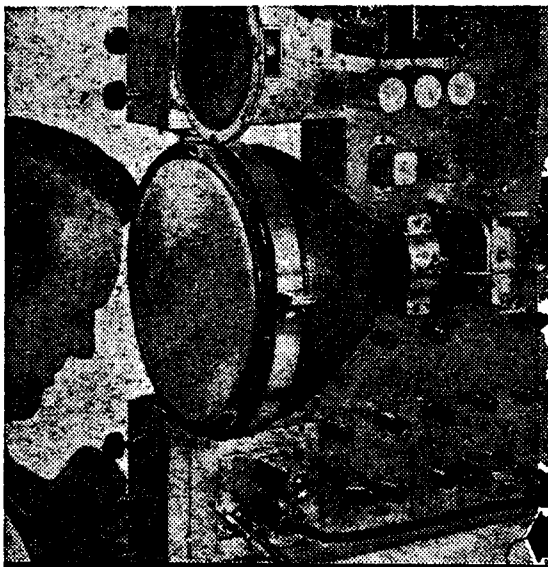

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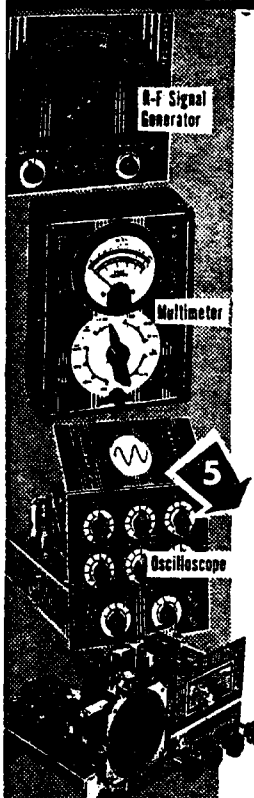


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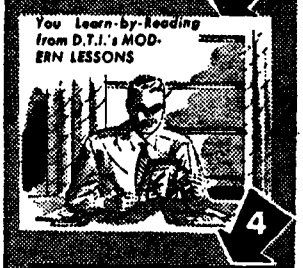

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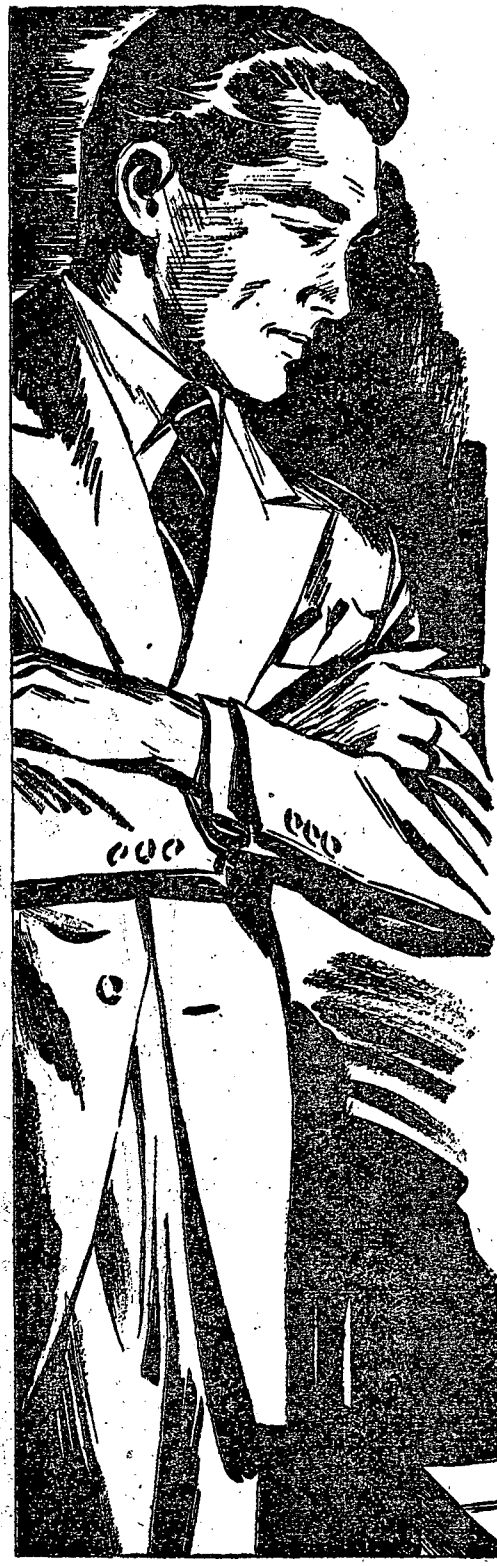

By
FAN NICHOLS

***Drue had to clear herself of a crime she didn't commit before she could devote her future to love.***

## CHAPTER ONE

### Haunted By Heartbreak

THE STEEL GATES of Medford Reformatory swung open and Drue Beckworth stepped into the outside world for the first time in two years. She lifted her dark gold head to the sunny May sky and smiled a bitter smile while her gold-brown eyes filled with tears. Her oval face was thin and pale; her slender, reed-like body looked fragile in the cheap blue suit the state had given her.

"Two years behind walls," she whispered. "Two years of paying for a crime I didn't commit!"

With a white cotton handkerchief she wiped away her tears. The time for crying was past. There was room for only one thought in her mind. She had to clear her name. It wasn't going to be easy, without friends or a lot of money, but somehow or other she must do it.

A small black coupé pulled up in front



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of her and stopped. She drew back, startled, as she recognized Zachary King, the investigator who had helped send her to Medford.

He opened the car door and said, "Hello, Drue. Get in and I'll drive you to New York."

"I'd rather walk every step of the hundred miles than ride with you!" she flung at him.

His blue eyes clashed with hers, and she thought: He hasn't changed at all, and her heart ached with remembering all the days in court that she had watched his tall, powerful figure, and looked into his uncompromising eyes. It was as if she had memorized the lean, hard mold of his face. She had seen it during the endless nights in prison, and sometimes she had dreamed of him. Yet in the dreams he had not been cynical and cold, but warm and loving, and she had been in his arms . . .

"Don't be a stubborn little fool," he said now. "I drove all the way up here to get you. You're just a kid, Drue, and I want you to get a good start now you're out. I want to help you."

"Like you helped me before?" she asked with irony. "Not listening to me; not believing me, but helping Sybil Vanderhof to send me here?"

"I had no choice, and you know it," he said. "The evidence was all against you. I'm an insurance investigator, don't forget. I work on facts. I was only doing my job. Forget the past, Drue. You're only twenty-two, and your whole life is ahead of you. Now get in, and stop arguing with me."

RELUCTANTLY SHE CLIMBED into the car, sitting as far as she could from him.

"I heard about your aunt dying," he said. "I'm sorry, Drue. "You have no family left now, have you?"

"No. She was the only person who believed in me," Drue said in a choked voice. "She knew me. She knew I wouldn't steal a pin. She left me all she had—a thousand dollars. They gave it to me this morning, along with a lecture on honesty being the best policy!"

Zack frowned. "So you still insist you were framed?"

"I'll prove that I was if it's the last thing I ever do!" she declared hotly.

"Relax, kid. Take it easy."

He started the car and drove rapidly toward the main highway which lead to New York. Miles passed before he said anything more to her, then he said gently, "Even if what you say is true, you won't stand a chance of proving it. Don't forget that Sybil Vanderhof is a millionaire's wife and—"

"And I'm an ex-convict!" she finished. "Furthermore, you don't believe me. You never did!"

"Facts are facts," he said. "Every person ever convicted of anything has claimed he was framed; that he was innocent. It's such an old story, Drue. Nobody's going to listen to you. Make up your mind to it!"

"I won't! I hate you, Zack King! Let me out of this car! I don't know why you bothered to come for me—"

He pulled over to the side of the highway and shut off the motor, his eyes searching her mutinous face. "I'll tell you why, Drue. Because you've haunted me these two years. Your beauty—your youth—your stubbornness. I want to keep you out of trouble this time."

Suddenly his arms were close around her and his lips were on hers, warm and stirring. For a moment she remained quiet because it was like reliving one of her dreams—Zack holding her, kissing her—and her heart wanting it, just as it did now. Then she pushed him away.

"Leave me alone," she ordered angrily. "Don't you dare touch me again!"

Yet when he did move away, a baffled, hurt look in his eyes, she wished he had

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not listened to her. She wanted him to go on holding her, kissing her, telling her that he cared what happened to her. She thought helplessly: I love him. I've loved him all this time, but I can't let him know because he thinks I'm a thief. He's only sorry for me. And there's no place in my life for love—only hate!

As he drove on Drue stared out of the window, her eyes reveling in the sight of the quickly moving landscape. May had touched the fruit trees with pink, and Drue imagined she could smell the apple blossoms.

"Was it bad in the reformatory?" Zack asked after a while.

"Bad enough." Her voice was dry. "At first I worked in the laundry, then they shifted me to the office. I was a secretary, you know. I was more valuable to them there. I read a great deal—there were movies, too." Against her will she shuddered and put her hands over her face. "It was awful," she whispered between her fingers. "Gray uniforms, a number, marching to meals, being cooped up with women, nothing but women—no will, no life of your own—feeling like an animal in a cage."

"Poor kid. Poor baby . . ." Very gently he put an arm around her shoulders and drew her near to him. At first she was rigid, resisting, then she relaxed against him as he drove. She knew it was wrong, and weak, yet she felt that for this little time she could permit herself the luxury of being near the man she loved. It was heaven to feel the rough tweed of his jacket, to smell the faint fragrance of his shaving lotion; to be aware of strong sinewy muscles.

It could not last, but she was used to denial. Perhaps, someday, if she could clear herself, she and Zack could begin again on a different basis. To herself she admitted, honestly, that she had never really blamed him for not believing her story. As he'd said—facts were facts, and the facts had been completely incriminating.

IT TOOK no effort of memory to review her case. She had been over it too many times in prison. The only story the public knew was that Drue Beckworth had been social secretary to Peter Vanderhof's wife, Sybil; that Sybil had given her a home for a year and paid her an excellent salary, and had treated her as one of the family. In repayment Drue Beckworth had stolen and pawned a hundred thousand dollars worth of her employer's furs. Her name, in her own admitted handwriting, had been signed to the pawn tickets. The pawnbroker had identified her as the young woman who brought the furs to him, telling him they were hers. On this evidence she had been arrested, convicted, and sentenced. Because she had been only twenty, with no previous record, the judge had been lenient.

But the real story was quite different. Sybil Vanderhof was the beautiful, spoiled young wife of an aging millionaire. She had married him for money, and then found he would give her anything *but* money. She had charge accounts at any store she chose; she could have all the clothes, jewels, and furs her heart desired—but the only cash she handled was a small allowance.

Old Peter Vanderhof had been smart. He had suspected he had bought a wife, and he was determined not to give her the money to run off with a younger man. By holding the purse strings, he held Sybil. Sybil had hated this, and him. She had made no bones about it to Drue. She had not even bothered to hide her many love affairs from Drue, although she took great pains to hide them from her husband.

Then Sybil, the rapacious, grasping, beautiful, doll-like Sybil, had fallen in love with Barry Drake, and everything had changed. She couldn't have found a more worthless man. He was a gigolo, and his

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profession was getting money from rich women. He was one of the handsomest males Drue had ever seen in her life. He had coal-black hair and sultry black eyes. He was well over six feet tall, with the build and grace of a dancer. His clothes were expensive and dramatic.

Sybil wanted Barry, and Barry wanted money. She had sold all the jewels she thought her husband wouldn't miss. When that money was gone, Barry stayed away. Even yet Drue could recall Sybil's hysteria, her mad determination to get him back.

Then one day in Spring she had instructed Drue to send her fur coats to storage.

She stood by Drue's desk, her diamonds flashing as she checked off the list in her imperious manner. "The chinchilla, the Russian sable, the ermine, and the minks," she said. "Everything but my platinum fox stole. I've arranged for a messenger to pick them up this afternoon. I'll be out, and the servants are off today, so I thought you might take care of it as a special favor. The furs are on my bed, and all you have to do is give them to the man and sign the receipts . . ."

AT TWO O'CLOCK that afternoon a stooped, gray man with a sharp face had appeared at the door of the tenth floor penthouse in the East Seventies, saying he had come for the furs at Mrs. Vanderhof's request. Drue was busy addressing invitations that had to go out in a rush. She had brought him the furs and hastily scribbled her name at the bottom of several printed forms, not bothering to read them. The man had handed her a regular fur storage receipt from the place where Sybil always stored her furs, and Drue had tossed it carelessly on her desk. At four o'clock a second messenger had appeared, asking for the furs, and she told him that they had already been picked up. That night when Sybil asked her for the receipt, in front of Peter Vanderhof, Drue had been unable to find it. She had turned the desk inside out, and searched the room, but there was no receipt.

"It doesn't matter," Sybil had smiled. "I'll call tomorrow and ask them to send me another receipt. I have to have it for the insurance company."

Drue had thought no more about it, not until Zack King had turned up late the following afternoon and started to ask her questions about the furs and the receipt. She told him exactly what had happened. She was bewildered when he told her the storage people did not have the furs, and that she had sent their messenger away at four o'clock, saying the furs were gone.

From then on events took on a nightmarish quality. Zack questioned her for hours, explaining that his company had insured the furs for a hundred thousand dollars, and he had to find them. If she would tell where they were, Sybil had promised not to prosecute her. She had sat huddled in a chair, staring at Zack with strained, terrified eyes, while the net closed in about her.

Three days later Zack had found the furs in a pawnbroker's vault. Sybil had never meant him to find them—she wanted the insurance money—yet she had covered the possibility of his finding them, for Roger Gray, the pawnbroker, told Zack that Drue had brought them to his shop; said they were hers, and had borrowed thirty thousand dollars on them. He showed Zack the pawn tickets with Drue's signature on them.

She had told Zack and her lawyer exactly what had occurred, yet she had no proof whatever, and they both advised her not to offer such a ridiculous defense. Consequently, neither in court nor in the newspapers, was her story told.

Until the last, Zack had pleaded with her to tell what she had done with the thirty thousand dollars. If she could return it, things would go easier for her.

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Since her denials made no impression on him, she had finally screamed at him in despair:

"I bought chocolate sodas with the money and ate them all! That's why you can't find it!"

But she knew, or thought she knew, who had gotten the thirty thousand dollars. Barry Drake . . .

THEY WERE crossing the George Washington Bridge into New York when Zack turned to Drue. "You've been doing a lot of thinking, haven't you? Where do you want me to take you? What are your plans?"

"I have no plans," she evaded.

"That money from your aunt won't last long. You'll have to find a job soon."

"Where?" she asked wryly. "Who would employ me? Who would trust me?"

"I would," he said. "I'll give you a job in my office, as my secretary."

Drue looked at his lean, hard profile for a long time. She said slowly, "No, thanks, Zack. And you're not as clever as you imagine. I've finally figured out why you met me, why you're interested in me, and why you offered me a job. You think I have that thirty thousand dollars your company had to pay to recover Sybil Vanderhof's furs. You're hoping that sooner or later I'll slip up, get the money from its hiding place, and start spending it!"

"My company has some sort of an idea like that," he admitted.

"What about *you*?" she demanded.

"I intend to keep an eye on you," he said flatly.

"At least we're out in the open." Her tone was tired and bitter. "I know exactly where I stand with you. Don't pretend you're a friend again, Zack."

"Whether I'm a friend or not, you might need me," he said. "A car has been following us for some time. The driver is a dark man wearing dark glasses and a concealing hat brim. I don't recognize him but you might."

Drue twisted around in the seat of the coupé and gazed out the back window.

"It's the blue convertible, about two cars back," Zack instructed.

Drue felt her eyes straining to see a dark face behind a windshield. Then suddenly the face turned sideways and she saw the dark, coin-like profile. Her heart skipped a beat, then began to race. It was Barry Drake!

Before she turned around again she managed to get control of her expression. Zack mustn't know! If Barry Drake were following her, it might mean that Sybil was uneasy now that Drue was free. That was the way she meant Sybil to be—uneasy. So uneasy that she might do something to give herself away.

"It's nobody I know," she said in answer to Zack's unspoken question.

"I don't believe you," he said. "You aren't that good an actress, kid."

"I don't care what you believe! Just drop me off at the Sherry-Plaza Hotel and I'll look after myself!"

"Isn't that rather expensive?"

"I want to be expensive for a few days. I'm going to buy some pretty clothes, Zack, and drink champagne, and eat roast breast of guinea hen! Can't you understand how I feel?"

"Yes, Drue," he said softly. There was no hardness in his face now, no coldness in his eyes. "Have fun, darling. You've had a bad time."

Drue bit her lip and averted her face. When he looked and spoke like that it broke through all of her stern resolves and she wanted to fling herself into the shelter of his arms and tell him that she loved him and needed him. Then she reminded herself that Zack's only interest in her was the recovery of missing money. That was all it was, or ever had been. His job meant more to him than a woman, or love.

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When she was alone in a corner room on the twenty-seventh floor of the Sherry-Plaza, Drue relaxed for the first time. After scrubbing her slim body and washing the odor of prison from her hair, she put on a robe and gazed hungrily at the tall skyscrapers of Manhattan. She loved this city—it was home. She had left her aunt's house in a small Iowa town when she was seventeen and had come here to take a business course and make her fortune. She hadn't known then what that fortune would be!

At last she forced herself to dress, make up her face, and get ready to go shopping. She had work to do. She had to push Zack from her heart and her mind. She had paid too high a price to go soft and weak now.

## CHAPTER TWO

**Someday You'll Understand . . .**

AT SIX O'CLOCK that evening a very different Drue Beckworth entered the cocktail lounge of the Sherry-Plaza and took a table for two in a corner. She wore a black crêpe cocktail suit, very *chic* and tight-fitting, spike-heeled black suede sandals, and a tiny black hat with a veil. Her tawny shoulder-length hair was caught into a net and she wore intriguing gold earrings and a wide gold bracelet. An aroma of French perfume enveloped her.

Her gold-brown eyes were wide and provocative, her full red lips inviting. Actually she was very tired, and bewildered by people and the noise of the city, yet she had planned her attack too long, too grimly, to waste time in adjustment.

As the minutes went by she grew nervous. What if she had miscalculated? What if Barry didn't come? But he must! Surely he wouldn't have bothered to follow Zack's car unless . . .

Her thoughts broke off abruptly. Barry Drake had entered the lounge. He sauntered casually to the bar, walking as if he believed every woman in the place was staring at him, which was absolutely right. He ordered a drink, then turned to look lazily at the tables. His glance stopped on Drue. His expression of astonishment would have fooled any bystander.

Drue smiled at him. He picked up his drink and came over to her table. "Is it really *you*?" he asked in a low, amazed voice. "I couldn't believe my eyes, darling. You look ravishing! May I join you?"

"If you like," Drue said. She smiled, yet her voice had a piquing quality of indifference. She hoped the frightened thudding of her heart wasn't visible in her face, for if what she surmised about him was true, Barry Drake might be very dangerous to her.

"I suppose it would be bad taste to inquire when you returned to New York," he said hesitantly.

"Today," she answered. "Sybil must have known. Didn't she tell you?"

"Sybil?" He seemed puzzled. "Oh—Sybil Vanderhof. I haven't seen her for a year or so. I never forgave her for what she did to you, Drue. Her husband could have made good the money to the insurance company. A few thousand dollars should have meant nothing to him. It was inexcusable—"

"I didn't know you felt that way, Barry." Drue lowered her eyes.

"But I did, my dear. We only met a few times, you and I, yet I always thought you were a beautiful, charming girl; far too young and too decent to be exposed to—the things you were. I'm sorry, Drue. We won't talk of the past. I'm just happy I've run into you. I hope you'll let me be your friend, because I like you. Now tell me, what are you planning to do?"

She drew in her breath, held it a tense moment, then let the bomb explode. "I'm planning to do plenty," she said. "You

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may not know it, Barry, but I was innocent. Sybil framed me—"

"Hush," he said. His hand closed tightly over hers. "Don't talk like that, Drue. Forget it. It's over and done with now."

"Not for me, it isn't." Her throat felt tight with apprehension.

His handsome black eyes bored into hers. "Please, Drue, for your own sake, take my advice. I know Sybil from the past. She's spoiled and ruthless. Don't cross her. Don't stir things up again. She'll hurt you—"

Very firmly Drue pulled her hand away from his. "I'm not afraid of Sybil, nor anyone else. Now I'd like to drink my Martini, please, and you might offer me a cigarette."

"Of course." He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a platinum case, but as he started to open it his hand shook and he dropped it to the floor. He bent down to retrieve it, swearing under his breath. As he straightened up a look of angry frustration contorted his dark face. "We're having company," he said, and Drue saw Zack King coming toward them.

"Hello, Drue." Zack towered above the table, smiling down at her as if they were old friends. She was furious with him, yet she dared not show it. She did not want interference now, especially from him.

RELUCTANTLY she introduced the two men and was vastly pleased to see no flicker of recognition in Zack's face. Obviously he didn't know Barry. Barry had not been drawn into the case, and Sybil's name had never been linked with his.

Without invitation Zack pulled up a chair and crowded in at the table. "I see you've been busy since I left you," he said. "You've really done things to your-


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self, honey. You're a knockout." He ordered a beer and lit a cigarette, then he turned to Barry and asked, "Are you an old friend of Drue's, too?"

"I am a former acquaintance of hers," Barry said stiffly. "I seem to remember you, Mr. King. Weren't you a witness against her at the trial?"

Zack nodded. Barry seemed puzzled. "I hardly understand why she should be friendly toward you," he said.

"She isn't," Zack said. "In fact, she hates my guts."

Barry scowled. "Then why are you bothering us?"

"I feel like it," Zack retorted. "Do you want to do anything about it, Mr. Drake?"

Barry's eyes swiftly took in Zack's big shoulders and strong hands. "I don't brawl in public." His tone was scornful.

"Oh, stop it, Zack," Drue pleaded. "Can't I even have a cocktail with a man without your following me? After all, the state set me free. I served my time. You've no right to hound me!"

"I can't think of anything more pleasant than hounding a beautiful girl," Zack grinned. Then he added blandly, "I'm interested in your future, Drue. I want to be sure you go straight and behave yourself."

Drue's mouth trembled. She fought back tears of indignation. She looked helplessly at Barry and he gave her hand a quick squeeze. "Don't worry, dear," he said softly. "I have an engagement for dinner, anyhow, but I'd like to take you out for dinner tomorrow night. May I call you tomorrow?"

"Please do, Barry," she murmured.

He rose, bowed to her, and ignoring Zack, left the lounge.

Zack settled down comfortably in his chair. "If I were a girl I'd hate to depend on a lug like that to protect me on a dark street."

"Oh, shut up!" Drue flared.

"Who is he, Drue? What is he to you?" he urged.

"I like him," she said. "I knew him years ago. He's one of the handsomest and most charming men I've ever met."

"Ouch," Zack said. "That hurt, kid. Here I thought I was handsome and charming."

"Cop!" she gritted.

"Oh, come now. I'm an investigator, a private detective. There's a difference."

"Well, I hope you earn enough to buy me another Martini. I need it after this show of yours!"

"By all means. Another Martini, waiter!" he called. Then he said earnestly, "I know Barry Drake by reputation, Drue. He's a shady character, to say the least. He has no known means of support, yet he lives like a movie producer. I have a very good idea how he does it. I don't like to disillusion you, but he wouldn't be bothering with you unless he thought you had money."

"The thirty thousand, I suppose," she said angrily. "Well, Zack, if you're right, then he'll lose interest in me quickly. Because there isn't any thirty thousand!"

"I know—you drank it all up in chocolate sodas," he reminded her. "Listen to me, Drue. Please. For your own good stay away from Barry Drake!"

"Maybe I'm in love with him," she said defensively.

"If you are, you'll get hurt."

"I'm so hurt already, what can I lose?" she challenged.

"I don't want you hurt, Drue." He leaned toward her and kissed her full on the mouth, paying no heed to the people around them. Then he put a bill on the table and got up. For a long moment his blue eyes battled hers. "I'll be seeing you," he said, and left her.

Beneath the table Drue's hands clenched into tight fists. Darn him! Why couldn't he leave her alone? Why did he have to kiss her and make her feel all

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weak inside? Did he think his kisses were going to make her confess to possession of money she didn't have?

A man can't be any lower than to pretend friendship and love to break a girl down, she thought fiercely. Thank heaven he doesn't know how I feel about him, or how I hate myself for feeling that way!

Leaving her untouched Martini on the table she went into the dining room and ordered everything on the menu which appealed to her, yet when it came she had very little appetite. Afterward she went alone to a play, and returned alone to her hotel room, so exhausted she had no wish but to sleep.

AS SHE LAY in the big soft bed, reveling in the feel of her new white satin nightgown, and the privacy of the room, the telephone rang on the night table beside her. Zack! She thought instantly. I won't answer it.

Then she thought it might be Barry, so she picked it up and said hello. From the other end came a muffled, throaty voice which sounded as if someone held a handkerchief over the telephone mouthpiece:

"This is a friend who wishes you well, Miss Beckworth," the voice said. "Forget the past or you will find yourself in serious trouble! This is a warning. I advise you to heed it."

There was a click at the other end. Whoever had called had hung up.

Drue stared at the telephone. She shivered. There was no way of identifying the voice—it might have been Sybil, or Barry—or even Zack.

Her small jaw set itself stubbornly. Let them threaten her! Nobody was going to stop her. She was not going through life branded as a thief, even if she lost her life proving her innocence!

The next day she took another step in the plan she had worked out. Using the telephone directory she tried to find the pawnbroker, Roger Gray, the man whose testimony had convicted her. His name was not listed, but she found a different name at the address where he had been. She took a taxi to the West Forties and went into the shop. A strange face peered at her from behind a grilled window.

"Is Mr. Gray here?" she asked.

"Gray?" The strange old man looked at her blankly. "I don't know nobody named Gray."

"He used to own this shop," Drue explained. "About two years ago. I've been out of town and just returned. He—he was a friend of my family's—"

"I don't know no Gray," the man insisted. "I bought this business from a man named Hawks about six months ago."

Drue persisted until she was convinced that the man would tell her nothing, whether or not he knew the whereabouts of Roger Gray. All she finally got out of him was the address of Mr. Hawks.

Down town, on the teeming, noisy streets of the lower East Side, she found another pawnshop. The man behind the counter admitted to being Hawks, but when she asked about Roger Gray, he, too, looked blank. He had bought the other shop from a man named Martin. He had no idea where Mr. Martin was, and he had never heard of Roger Gray.

A wild-goose chase, she thought. I suppose I should have known Roger Gray would disappear. Sybil must have paid him well to get out of town."

One hope was blasted, yet she felt, instinctively, that Barry was involved in all this, and tonight she was seeing Barry.

AS SHE ENTERED the hotel lobby, trying not to appear as dispirited as she felt, Zack's tall body unfolded itself from a chair and came toward her. She tried to push past him, but he blocked her way. Very firmly he took her arm and piloted her to a sofa in the lobby.

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"Sit down, Drue," he ordered. "I want to talk to you."

"I don't want to talk to you—or see you! Are you following me night and day?"

"Practically," he said. "Someone has to. You need a nursemaid, you crazy kid. What did you hope to gain by running all over town to pawnbrokers' shops all day today?"

"You know?" she gasped.

He nodded. "You were looking for Roger Gray. Why?"

Her gold-brown eyes were defiant. "Because he lied at the trial. He knows I didn't steal those furs. He can clear me—"

Zack's mouth was a hard line. "What makes you think he would admit to perjury? Why should he clear you now if he wouldn't clear you then?"

"I—I suppose you're right," she whispered. "I just hoped."

Now his face was taut, almost threatening. "You've got to stop this, Drue. You're obsessed. Either that—or Roger Gray has the money and you want it."

"Believe whatever you please," she said.

"That job in my office is still open, Drue."

"No," she said, "If you want to help me, Zack, find Roger Gray. If you're any good as a detective you ought to be able to do that much. I must talk to him!"

He took her hands in his, holding them tightly. "Roger Gray won't help you, honey, even if I could find him. I talked to him plenty at the time of your trial. He wouldn't help his own grandmother across the street! Believe me."

Drue thought swiftly, then she said, "If I tell you that Roger Gray has the thirty thousand dollars—that he's holding it for me—will you try to find him?"

Zack dropped her hands as if they burned him. "I might," he said harshly.

To look Zack in the eyes and lie to him was the hardest thing Drue had ever had to do in her life, but she forced herself to do it, knowing that she, alone, could never find the pawnbroker.

She said in a level voice, "Roger Gray has the money. Since I can't get it, you might as well have it. Find him!"

In the space of seconds lines seemed to have formed bitter brackets around Zack's mouth. Even his eyes changed to a steely gray.

"Will you accuse him?" he demanded.

"Yes," she said, thinking that if Zack found him and she accused him, Gray might implicate Sybil to shift some of the blame from himself.

"All right, Drue. I'll try." He stood up and strode out of the lobby.

Upstairs, in her room, Drue fell in a heap on the bed and let the tears come. If Zack had ever been inclined to believe in her, he didn't now. A glint, almost of hatred, had been in his eyes when he left her.

"Oh, Zack, Zack," she whispered. "I love you so much. I didn't want to lie to you. I hope you'll understand some day and forgive me."

## CHAPTER THREE

### To Make Him Love Her

AT FIVE O'CLOCK Barry called to say he would pick her up for cocktails and dinner at six-thirty. She promised to be waiting in the lobby for him. With straining effort she pulled herself together, took an ice-cold shower, and began carefully to make up and dress. She must be as lovely as possible tonight. She must try to win Barry over to her side, to get him to talk. Then hopelessness washed over her as she contemplated it. She knew she was utterly inexperienced; a babe in the woods when it came to dealing with people like Barry and Sybil and Roger Gray, yet she had to try.

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Barry's eyes quickened with approval when she met him in the lobby. Her dinner dress was of royal blue with a stand-up collar and plunging neckline, and over her shoulders was a cape of the same color. She wore a small blue hat and gold accessories. A good-sized chunk of the money her aunt had left her had gone for this outfit and the black cocktail suit. When she bought them she knew it was sheer extravagance, that she should not be so extravagant, but she had been starved for lovely things. Besides, she wouldn't have had a chance with Barry if she looked drab and colorless.

Barry was his usual suave, matinee-idol self in a maroon dinner jacket and black tie. He took Drue's arm as if she were the most precious, beloved woman in the world, and escorted her to a taxi.

"I was going to hide you away in a little French restaurant, *ma cherie*," he smiled, "but you look far too glamorous to be hidden. How does this appeal to you—the Sert Room for dinner, a few good night spots, then El Morocco for dancing?"

"What girl could say no?" Drue murmured. "Really, Barry, I don't understand all this attention from you. I'm having a fling for a few days to celebrate my freedom—but I'll have to go back to being a secretary. That is, if anyone will employ me."

"Just view yourself in a mirror and you'll understand my interest," he said. "As for a job, perhaps I can find something for you. Don't worry about it tonight. Please!"

All during dinner his eyes caressed her and his words were honeyed flattery. She realized he was pouring out charm, and she wondered if he did it at Sybil Vanderhof's instruction. Probably, she thought. Anyhow, she did have roast guinea hen and champagne at his expense.

Between dinner courses they danced two or three times. At first she was rusty and awkward, then she recovered and fitted her steps to Barry's, marveling at his expertness. Nobody could dance a rumba as he could, and she told him so. He looked pleased.

He said disarmingly, "I used to make my living as a dancing teacher, Drue. I used to follow the sun, to Miami Beach, Rio, Havana, and teach rich, fat, old women to rumba." A cynical smile twisted his handsome mouth. "It paid very well."

"The dancing lessons—or the women?" she asked daringly.

He shrugged. "What's the difference? A man has to live. I'm lazy. I wouldn't punch a time clock if I starved to death. But let's not talk about me. You're far more interesting. Yesterday, before that detective interrupted us, I wanted to tell you again that I always believed your story. I always thought you were innocent. Too bad you couldn't prove it . . ." His voice trailed off and he looked questioningly down at her.

Again, with a thudding heart, she took the offensive. "I should have gone to Peter Vanderhof before I was arrested. I knew him quite well, and I'm sure he liked me. Perhaps he would have listened to me if I had told him a few facts about Sybil."

"Such as?" he urged.

"The men she had clandestine dates with—the jewels she sold without his knowledge. Perhaps it isn't too late now. I'd like to have a long talk with him. Maybe tomorrow morning at his office . . ."

Barry missed a step. There was a dark flush under his tan. "That would be a foolish thing to do!" he said sharply. "If you start dragging up the past and making accusations you can't prove, it won't help you. If it's money you need, Drue, I can lend you some—"

"Why should you?" she asked.

His arm tightened around her and he

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bent his face down to hers. "Because I'm crazy about you. I never thought I'd fall in love with any woman—especially a slip of a girl without money. But I have, Drue. I'm head over heels in love with you, darling!"

Her mouth was soft; her eyes dreamy. "I've never known anyone like you, Barry," she murmured. "But I'd be afraid to fall in love with you. You've known so many beautiful women."

"Never one as beautiful as you, my sweet!" His lips brushed her neck, her cheek. "Let's be happy together. Let's forget our pasts, both mine and yours."

With an effort she made her body relax into his embrace as they danced. Let him think she loved him; let him think she was a silly little fool.

THEN, SUDDENLY, as the music stopped and they started back to their table, Drue felt herself freeze. At a table by the door, alone, watching her, was Zack King. At first she was happy to see him, then frustration caught at her as she realized he was still following her everywhere she went.

"I'd like to leave now," she told Barry. "That man is here again."

Barry frowned, following her glance. "What is he after, Drue? Why this persecution?"

"Money," she said. "His company had to pay out the thirty thousand to redeem Sybil's furs. He thinks I still have it—or some of it, at least. He wants it."

"I see." Barry's eyes narrowed. He picked up Drue's cape and placed it around her shoulders. Neither of them glanced at, or spoke to Zack as they left.

The moment they were in a taxi, Barry kissed her and she made herself accept his kiss although his touch and his lips made her feel almost physically ill. He was really putting it on now, telling her he had always adored her, that he had waited anxiously for her to return to New York, that he never wanted another girl as long as he lived. Drue accepted his protestations with a naïve manner, pretending she believed every word of it. But she was grateful when the taxi stopped before a night club on the East Side.

Barry ordered more champagne and became more ardent. Drue was careful to sip hers and urge him to have more and more in the hope that the wine would loosen his tongue and he might tell her something.

Hours seemed to pass. They went from night club to night club, and everywhere they went Zack King followed them. Sometimes Drue would catch a glimpse of him in a doorway, or standing at the bar, or waiting across the street. Why?

Finally Barry said, "We aren't doing a very good job of shaking that detective, are we? Why don't you come up to my apartment for a nightcap? He can't follow us there—"

Drue looked demure. "I couldn't do that, Barry."

"Why not?" He moved his chair against hers and slipped his arm about her waist. His touch was knowing, possessive, demanding. "I love you—"

"I can't do it, Barry," she insisted.

While Zack's eyes were on them, Barry kissed her mouth with lingering passion. Suddenly this game sickened Drue. She hated Barry and his too expert love-making. She felt cheap and mauled. With all the liquor he had drunk he hadn't said one thing of value to her. He probably wouldn't. She was no Mata Hari and never would be, simply a naïve girl who was making an idiot of herself for nothing! And Zack—what must he think of her?

"I want to go back to my hotel now, Barry," she said.

"No, honey. You can't leave me. Please!" He reached for her and she stood up. Anger gleamed in his eyes. "What do you think you're doing?"

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"I'm leaving," she snapped tartly.

"Don't you love me?" he asked in astonishment.

"No," she said. "I'm neither a rich old woman, nor a stupid young woman who's willing to pay for your obnoxious attentions. Good night!"

WITH HER HEAD HIGH, her cheeks scarlet with self-loathing, Drue made her way swiftly to the entrance of the night club. As she reached the door an arm reached past her and opened it, and a deep, sarcastic voice asked, "Had enough, kid?"

Drue stumbled and a firm arm caught her. Her head went back and her eyes met the full accusing impact of Zack's. For a moment fury lashed her, then it died out in weariness.

"I've had enough, Zack," she whispered. "Just one thing—Why have you followed me tonight?"

"I wanted to speak to you alone. I found out that Roger Gray left for South America soon after your trial. He has never returned—"

She gripped his arm to brace herself against this blow to her hopes. But all she said was, "Thanks, Zack."

"What will you do now?" he asked.

"I don't know. I just don't know."

He put her in a taxi and gave the driver the address of her hotel. "Get some sleep," he advised coldly. "Use some reason, Drue. Stop acting like the misused heroine in a B picture. I'll see you tomorrow."

He slammed the door shut and stepped back on the sidewalk. The last Drue glimpsed was his hard blue eyes and lean, unsmiling face. She felt as if she had been spanked and sent home to bed like a bad child.

Again hopelessness washed over her. Roger Gray was out, and so was Barry. She had hoped for so much from this date tonight, and the result was zero, and Zack's contempt. That hurt more than anything else. Zack was honest and decent, not like the Barrys of the world. Zack was the sort of man a woman could trust with her life, and her love, forever.

Abruptly she realized something she had not fully known until now—the basic motivation of her desire to clear her name. It wasn't just for herself and it never had been. She could have gone from the reformatory to some strange town or city, changed her name, found a job, and lived down the past. That would have been the easy way. But always, in her heart and mind, had been the memory of Zack, the yearning and love for him. She knew now that it was because of Zack she wanted vindication, because she had secretly hoped that some day he might love her and marry her, and she had known he never would so long as he believed her a thief.

All night she tossed restlessly, making new plans and discarding them. So far she had been running up blind alleys, getting nowhere. She had warned Barry of her intentions, feeling sure he would tell Sybil. She had hoped to flush Sybil out into the open, yet nothing had happened beyond the mysterious phone call last night. She could think of nothing now but to go to Peter Vanderhof. There was a slim chance he might listen to her and help her. Certainly Sybil deserved no consideration!

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Blind Alley to Love

AROUND ELEVEN the next morning she walked into the Wall Street offices of Peter Vanderhof and Company. For this visit she wore the cheap blue suit the State had bought her and carried her shabby handbag in cotton-gloved fingers. Her knees were weak; she wanted to turn and run. Only grim determina-

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tion made her walk up to the girl at the switchboard and give her name.

"Just a moment, I'll ring Mr. Vanderhof," the girl said.

Drue waited nervously. What if he refused to see her? What could she do?

Then the girl said, "Will you please wait a few minutes, Miss Beckworth? Mr. Vanderhof is busy, but he will see you as soon as possible."

Drue sat down, interlocking her fingers to keep them from shaking. In her mind she rehearsed over and over what she would say to him. If she could create a reasonable doubt in his mind he might send someone to South America to find Roger Gray. He could afford it. On the other hand, maybe he wouldn't listen to her at all. Maybe it would be another blind alley. After all, why should he take her word against his wife's?

The minutes ticked by. Ten minutes, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five. Just when Drue felt she couldn't bear waiting another second the girl called and told her to go in.

Opening a door marked PRIVATE, Drue found herself in a hallway. There were several doors opening from it, but finally she found the one with Vanderhof's name on it. She stood before the door, gathering her courage. Then her hand touched the knob, turned it, and she walked in. When she saw the figure behind the big desk her body grew rigid.

"Well, come in and shut the door," an imperious feminine voice ordered. "We're alone, Drue, just the two of us. Make yourself comfortable."

"Sybil . . ." Drue whispered, staring at the exquisite, doll-like blonde who sat watching her.

"Yes, it's Sybil," the other woman mocked. "You didn't think I'd really allow you to see Peter, did you? I arrived before you did, and when you were announced he was only too glad to trot off for a day of golf at his club. I told him the interview was bound to be unpleasant, and I'd be glad to handle it for him. He sends his regrets, dear."

Drue didn't answer, but the bitter curve returned to her mouth. Sybil hadn't changed at all. She was flawless and expensive from head to toe. Only the ruthless hostility in her green eyes betrayed her.

"Then you knew I intended coming here," Drue stated.

"I knew."

"Barry told you—"

"Naturally." Sybil fitted a cigarette into a carved jade holder and lit it.

Drue took a deep breath. "Did he also tell you that he spent hours making love to me? That he kissed me in every night-club in town?"

Sybil started from the chair, jealousy flaming in her eyes. "You're lying!"

Drue leaned back in her own chair, pretending an ease she was far from feeling. "I found him obnoxious and boring, Sybil. I can't understand what you see in him."

Sybil relaxed again. "He told me you made threats against me. That's what I want to talk to you about."

"Didn't you make some threats yourself on the phone the other night?" Drue accused. "Warning me as a *friend*?"

Sybil chewed on her thin lower lip. "You can't possibly gain anything with these ridiculous assertions of yours, Drue. Nobody believed you two years ago. Nobody will believe you now."

"Nevertheless I'm going to try to make someone believe me," Drue said defiantly. "I won't let you get away with what you did to me, Sybil. I never harmed you, yet you made me spend two years in prison. I hated it, every minute of it, and I—"

"Now you're boring *me*. What do you want, Drue?" Sybil interrupted. She glanced at her diamond-set watch. "I'll give you five hundred dollars. It's all I can raise right now. Why don't you go to Chicago or out West and start over?"

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Drue shook her head. "I'm staying here. As long as I'm around you won't sleep too well at night, Sybil. You'll be wondering what I'm doing, and if I've found a weak link in the chain you forged against me. And I won't warn you the next time I decide to talk to your husband! You don't dare harm me again. If you do, a few people might begin to think my story wasn't a dream!"

"How clever of you," Sybil murmured. "In fact, you're so clever, dear, you won't need that five hundred dollars, I'm sure." Again she looked at her watch. Then she adjusted her mink stole and stood up. "There's no point in prolonging this unpleasant meeting," she said. "You're a stupid little secretary and I'm Peter's wife. No one is ever going to listen to anything you have to say against me. I hope you come to your senses and stop annoying me."

Without speaking again she opened a door beyond the desk and went out, closing it behind her.

DEFEAT dogged Drue's footsteps as she went back to the Sherry-Plaza. She had no idea where to turn or what to do next. As she walked into the lobby she saw two uniformed policemen talking to the hotel detective. They saw her and stared at her. People in the lobby turned and looked at her, too. She walked on casually.

But no one spoke to her. She got into the elevator and gave her floor number. Something was wrong, terribly wrong, yet she couldn't imagine what it was. When she left the elevator she saw a policeman standing near the door of her room. Fear clutched her. She went on, taking the key out of her purse. All the while the policeman looked at her but said nothing. As she fitted it into the lock he turned toward the elevators, and disappeared.

She pushed her door open.

Zack stood in the middle of her room. The room itself was a shambles, the bed torn apart, the mattress ripped open, and all of her personal belongings were strewn over the rug.

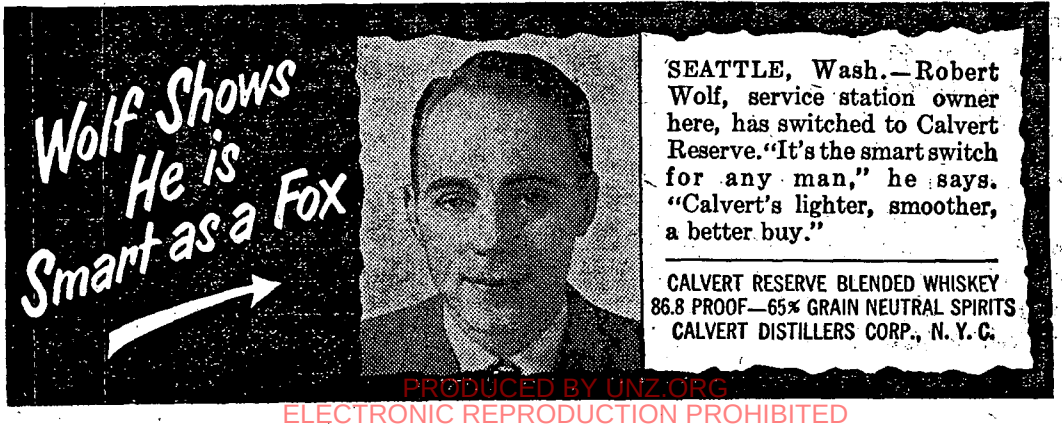
"Why did you come back here?" Zack demanded hoarsely. "Didn't you know your room would be the first one searched?"

"*Searched?*" Drue pressed fingers against her temples. The room whirled dizzily before her eyes.

"Yes, searched," he repeated. "The jewel robbery was reported at eleven-thirty. The police scanned the hotel register, saw your name, and decided to check you before starting a man hunt!"

Drue stiffened. "I don't understand, Zack. What on earth are you talking about?"

"I'll begin again," he snapped. "Mrs. Larrimore, who has a corner suite on this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floor, reported that her jewels were missing. Fifty thousand dollars' worth. And my company has them insured!"

"But what has that to do with me?" Drue asked in bewilderment.

"The jewels were found in *your* mattress," Zack said.

Drue felt as if he had thrown her into a deep river. She struggled a moment, then the waters swept over her head and she knew nothing.

WHEN SHE regained consciousness Zack was holding a cold cloth on her forehead. As she opened her eyes he removed it and went to the bath to wet it again. Everything rushed back into her mind, and she knew the net had closed around her once more. She remembered the long wait in Peter Vanderhof's outer office, and Sybil's stalling and looking at her wrist watch. Sybil was back of this—and Barry! It was another perfect frame."

Quietly, grimly, Drue crept toward the door of the room. The water was still running in the bath. She took off her shoes and held them in her left hand, then she turned the knob of the door and peered out. The policeman wasn't there.

In stocking feet Drue ran down two flights of stairs, then put on her shoes and sought the service elevator. Luckily it wasn't busy. Getting into it she rode to the basement. Before her was an open door and she hurried through it to a side street. A moment later she was in a taxi.

On the verge of hysteria, scarcely knowing what she did, she directed the driver to Third Avenue and told him to wait for her outside a pawnshop. Tense and raging inside, she still appeared quiet. Without seeming too hurried she bought a fancy, pearl-handled revolver.

At the entrance of Sybil Vanderhof's apartment house she paid the driver and hurried out of the taxi. There were no bullets in the gun, but she hoped the sight of it would be enough to frighten Sybil.

She did not knock at the door of the penthouse. It wasn't locked. No one was expecting her. She opened it and walked into the once-familiar living room. No one was there. But she heard laughter from the library, and Sybil's voice mingling with Barry's.

Drue stood in the door of the library, the revolver in her hand.

She said, "Is something funny, Sybil?"

BOTH OF THEM whirled to face her. Barry backed away, fright in his dark face.

Sybil gasped. "What do you want?" she whispered.

"A full confession, on paper, right now!" Drue ordered. "Don't think I won't use this gun. I have nothing to lose."

"But—murder," Sybil protested. "You can't kill us, Drue! You won't get more than four or five years for the jewel robbery—we had to do it to get rid of you! We couldn't risk your spilling everything to Peter. He's suspicious of us already. And we heard Roger Gray is returning from Buenos Aires—"

"Shut up, Sybil," Barry said.

He looked at Drue. "There's no point in shooting *me*, my dear. Both frameups were Sybil's idea. The first one she worked herself, with Gray's help."

"But *you* got the money!" Sybil accused. "I wouldn't have done it if you hadn't threatened to leave me. Money! Always money! It's your fault, even if I did it. I did it for *you*!"

"And I pulled this jewel robbery and planting it on Drue just for *your* sake, darling," he grated.

Drue moved slowly toward the big desk at the side of the room. She opened a drawer and took out several sheets of paper, and a fountain pen. Holding the gun on Sybil, she said, "Write it down, Sybil. All of it. Hurry."

"I will not!" Sybil stormed. "You

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wouldn't dare shoot me!" she screamed.

Barry grabbed Sybil and pushed her over to the desk. "Go ahead, write a confession, before she shoots both of us! I'm not going to get hurt for something *you* cooked up!"

Behind Drue a deep authoritative voice said, "Nobody's going to get hurt, especially this poor kid you've already hurt beyond reason!"

Zack and two policemen stepped into the room. Drue felt herself collapsing again, felt the tears coming. Then suddenly Zack's arms were holding her.

"I let you get away from the hotel," Zack told her. "I figured you'd come here and they might give themselves away, believing they were safe. We followed you and heard everything they said. It's over, Drue. All of it. You're free and clear. Now it's their turn to pay!"

The policemen took a raging Sybil and a frightened Barry out of the room, leaving Drue alone with Zack.

He held her close and kissed her with loving tenderness. "I love you so much, darling," he murmured. "I've loved you for so long—"

"How could you love me and not believe a word I said?" she whispered.

"I did believe you," he said soberly. "A dozen times I wanted to tell you, but you were in enough danger already. I knew that if Sybil or Barry suspected for one minute that I was on your side, helping you, they would either kill you or try to get out of the country. As long as they thought no one believed you, that I was hounding you, they felt fairly safe. You're a brave kid, but you'd never make a detective, honey. I was afraid if you knew I believed you, you'd give it away. Can you understand, my darling? I was trying to protect you. Oh, Drue, forgive me. Tell me you love me—"

"Yes, I love you," she whispered. That's why I had to prove my innocence. For you . . ."

He put his hand under her chin and tilted her tear-wet face up to his. "Smile, sweetheart," he pleaded. "Life is just beginning for Mr. and Mrs. King. It's going to be a happy, wonderful life! I'll make you forget those bitter, wasted years."

"I've already forgotten, Zack. There is no yesterday now—only tomorrow, with you . . ."

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By VIOLA CORNETT

# Love Me . . .

He said with a kind of dreary hopelessness, "You're crying about me, and that's what I don't want."



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# and Say Good-Bye

***Donna and Rick were rationed a big piece of heaven, for just a little while . . . Could their love find a magic formula to stretch it to eternity?***

THE PARTY at the Fontaine home was at its height when the tall, dark stranger with the green eyes entered the big basement rumpus room.

But he wasn't a stranger to Donna Leroy. Seated at one side of the room, she saw him as he hesitated in the doorway. Every drop of blood in her body



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seemed to rush instantly to her heart. She gripped her hands together in her lap until the knuckles went white. Somehow, she kept her bronze head high and held onto her casual smile. And she couldn't help being proud of herself, for it was the bravest thing she had ever done in all her life.

The last time she had seen Rick Merritt, he had worn a pirate's costume at a masquerade.

She'd seen him only for a little while without his mask, but long enough for his strong features to etch themselves on her memory forever.

This was Rick Merritt, whom she had learned to hate. But when she met him again tonight, he mustn't find out that he'd ever had any power over her emotions. He must never discover that she had once believed that love at first meeting was a reality.

His green eyes roved the room, in the almost shy, grave way she remembered. His well-cut mouth still had the same sensitivity, and the lines of his face were as fine. He had a queerly noble, knightly look. But how deceiving appearances could be!

SUDDENLY HE SAW HER. The green eyes widened, and even across the room she could see that he paled a little. Then he started to turn, and she knew he was going to leave.

Quick as a flash she moved across the room and held out a steady hand.

"It's Rick Merritt, isn't it?" she said coolly. "I thought I recognized you."

He hesitated, then took her hand. His was cold, and it seemed to her that it shook a little as he said, "Hello, Donna. What a coincidence, meeting you here."

Coincidence? Or was it destiny, giving her a chance at revenge? She'd been so vulnerable, that night in San Francisco six months ago. She had believed his lies; she had accepted a casual Lothario's glib line as sincerity. But now it was her turn to laugh.

She said lightly, "What are you doing in a small town like Monte Vista? I thought you were a confirmed big city newspaper man."

He smiled a little. "Oh, I'm still with the *Star*. Only I've just been promoted to byline stuff. That's why I'm here. Monte Vista is considered by my editor to be the typical American small town. I am to do a series of articles about it and live here while I'm writing them."

Suddenly the beat of Donna's heart was choking her. Could Rick have asked for this assignment because he knew she lived here? Then she remembered, with a sickening recoil from hope to cold sanity, that she hadn't told him where she lived, or even her last name. He had said that he wanted her to be a mystery; that a mystery was glamorous. They'd made that crazy appointment to meet at noon the next day, in Union Square. But she had waited, and waited, and he had not come. Fearing something was wrong, she had phoned the *Star*. Rick was out on a story, she learned.

Smiling with relief, she left a message for Rick for him to phone her at her hotel. It was time to stop playing the game of mystery, she thought. Masks were all right for a masquerade, but reality would be much better. Because this thing between them was vital and alive, not something fragile, born of moonlight and fantasy.

But he didn't call her back, neither that day nor the next. Perhaps he hadn't received the message, she reasoned. So she sent him a note, asking him to phone her, signing it merely "Donna."

He didn't phone, and she stayed in San Francisco for all the remaining ten days of her vacation, with never a word from him. Then she knew, with sickening certainty, that what had been wonder and glory to her had been just an amusing

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flirtation to Rick. She had to face it.

You could hate a man who talked poetry without meaning it; who lifted you to the stars on a casual whim, and then walked out of your life without a good-bye. And Donna did learn to hate Rick Merritt during the long and terrible days when she sat in her hotel room alone, waiting for him to phone. Waiting and waiting . . .

SHE CAME back to the present with a wrenching effort, to see Rick staring at her with a strange, reserved expression in his green eyes. And anger flooded her heart. Probably he was embarrassed, wondering if she were going to make a scene about his conduct of six months before.

She said coolly, "So you'll be with us a while? That's nice. I'm sure you'll like Monte Vista."

A small silence fell, after her formal and meaningless words. Then Rick said awkwardly, "Donna, about . . ." He paused, moistening his lips, seeming unable to go on.

She had never felt so cruel in all her life as she drawled, "About what, Rick?" And she smiled at him with derisive sweetness.

He flushed. "I'd like to talk to you alone. Please . . ." He stared deep into her shadowed blue eyes.

So he was going to explain, apologize. Well, it wouldn't do any good, but listening to him try to make amends might be amusing. It would make up, a little, for those terrible days when she had waited in the hotel room, straining her ears toward the telephone, walking the floor with dreadful nervousness, praying, "Rick, Rick, please call, please. Let it be real and wonderful, the way I thought it was at first. Please!"

Now it was he who was begging. Donna's mouth set, hard. Then she said evenly, "Let's go out to the patio."

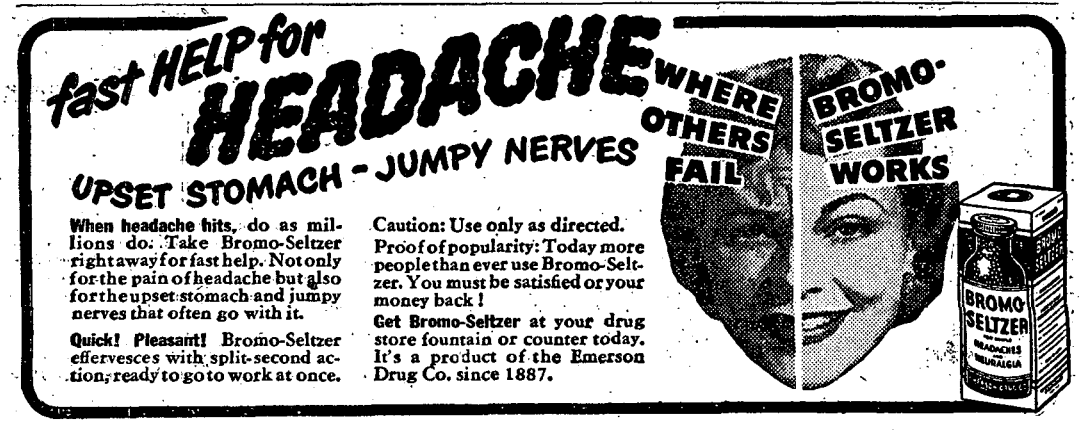
There was a moon, round and mellow and good-humored looking. The patio was pleasant, with wrought-iron furniture, and a barbecue pit. Donna sat on the comfortable glider, and Rick dropped down beside her.

The silence stretched long, and harsh between them, and then Donna said, "Well?" trying to keep the impatience out of her voice.

He groped in his pockets, found a cigarette case that gleamed silver in the moonlight. Then, without opening it, he put it back. His face was very white, his mouth set.

He said, "I meant to meet you that day in San Francisco, Donna. Only I realized it was wiser not to. I kind of lost my head that night, said things I—I didn't mean." He paused, staring at her with a queer pleading.

She wanted to laugh, wildly. So he was feeling guilty, was he! Well, she'd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make him believe it hadn't meant a thing to her.

She forced a laugh. "Oh, for goodness' sake, why all the drama? I was angry at you, I'll admit, for standing me up. And you really wrecked my vacation, for I'd really counted on you to show me the town. As it was, I just went around by myself."

She made herself pout, like a girl who is merely irritated with a man. "I should have realized you were a love-'em-and-leave-'em type. Aren't newspaper men famous for that sort of thing? But I guess I was just a naïve country girl, fascinated by a big-town line." Her tone was pettish and half-amused.

He stared down at her with those changeful green eyes. She couldn't read his expression, but guessed that he was wondering if she was being sincere, or speaking out of hurt pride, because he had stood her up.

If she acted like a girl who was easy to kiss, she'd convince him. She leaned toward him a little. She said gaily, "I never did meet a man, before or since, who could make love as effectively as you can—I'll admit that." And she lifted her mouth invitingly, and narrowed her eyes in a seductive way as she looked up at him.

She could feel him stiffen, almost hear the question in his mind. Then suddenly his arms were around her, and he was kissing her, with a strange, fierce hunger.

And her pride was nothing, and her anger was nothing, and her hatred just didn't exist. Donna clung to Rick, and answered his kiss with lips as fiercely hungry as his own.

Then just as abruptly, he freed her, and stood up. Dazed with the riot of her own blood, Donna stared up at him. "Rick . . ." she whispered.

He made a sharp gesture. "You were lying, playing it light. Now I know you were lying. But I wish you hadn't been!" A strange sort of pain came into his voice. "Don't let me mean anything to you, Donna. Forget me!"

And then he walked away from her, toward the path that led to the front of the house.

Donna wanted to cry out for him to come back, to kiss her again, dance with her again, be with her forever. But he was leaving, and he had told her to forget him.

Bewildered and heartbroken, she put her hands over her face, and the feeling of the warm tears against her slim fingers only made those tears come faster. Once before she had felt like this, six months ago, in San Francisco. But the second time, it was worse. Much worse . . .

IT WAS STRANGE to go to her little hat shop, the Donnamode, next day, and to wait on customers with her usual smile. She wondered why one man, out of all the world, should have the power to upset her so. It wasn't that she was lonely, or unpopular, had ever lacked for dates or fun. But one kiss from Rick had turned the world into a place of enchantment. It was just that way, and there was nothing she could do about it.

No, it didn't do any good to tell herself she was being adolescent and foolish. All she knew was that she was in love with Rick Merritt, and had to see him again. Every moment without him was an emptiness; every day without him was torture.

But what could she do? Rick had walked out on her twice. The last time, he had told her to forget him. Yet she remembered the queer pain in his voice as he said that. He had not spoken like the casual Lothario she had thought him to be after the heartbreaking meeting in San Francisco.

All day, she smiled, and chatted gaily, and tried to act like her usual self. But it was as though all the rest of the world

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were a dream, and Rick was the only reality . . .

The pain in her own heart seemed more than she could bear. She had to find out why he had walked out on her twice. A plan began to form in her mind.

Her hosts last night were Glenn and Verbia Fontaine, a young couple prominent in the social life of Monte Vista. Glenn was the owner and editor of the local newspaper, *The Clarion.*

She went back to her office at the back of the store, leaving the two saleswomen in charge. Quickly, she called *The Clarion,* and asked for Glenn.

She said casually, "I met an old acquaintance at your place last night—Rick Merritt. We had a long chat, and when he found out about my shop, and that I occasionally design hats myself, he asked me to design and make one for—for a relative of his. But I've some questions to ask him about it, and he forgot to tell me where he's staying."

She stopped, praying she had sounded casual enough. She evidently had, for Glenn said pleasantly, "He has a suite at the Inn, Donna." He chuckled in an amused way. "So call him up and ask him if the feather should go on the side or at the back."

Donna's hand was trembling as she replaced the phone. She thought, I'm a fool. Why must I insist on seeing him again? Why do I torture myself?

Because it would be worse torture not to see him, her heart answered grimly. And because she had to find out, if she could, the reason for the way he had treated her.

Before she had time to lose courage, she slipped on her coat, picked up her bag, and left the shop. It was only a brief walk to the Monte Vista Inn, and she was pleased at the steadiness of her own voice as she asked the clerk at the desk to announce her to Rick.

He told the clerk to send her up. Somehow, she had known he would not refuse to see her, that he was too much of a gentleman to give her an obvious brush-off with a third person listening in.

Her lips were set hard against trembling as she walked down the corridor to his suite. Her knock on the door was barely audible.

But Rick opened the door immediately. His lean face was set, and there was that same pallor she had noticed the evening before. She realized he was under some great strain, and that realization put her more at ease. A little of the tenseness went out of her body, and she managed a smile.

"Hello, Rick," she said.

HIS GREEN EYES met hers. There was a kind of desperation in them. He said tautly, "Why have you come here? You shouldn't have, Donna." His voice broke a little on the last word.

She made a sharp gesture. "Let me in. Please. I must talk to you." Her eyes were twin blue prayers.

His shoulders went rigid. He started to speak, and she knew he was going to ask her to leave. Quickly, she put a hand on his arm. *"Please,* Rick," she whispered.

His mouth set, and she could feel the tensing of his whole body, as though he were setting himself to send her away, for good this time. Then, suddenly, a strange expression of defeat came over his face. He said, "I've tried, Lord knows I've tried. But—"

He stepped back, waved her into the room, and closed the door behind her. Very quietly, they faced each other, but the quietness was like a silent storm of wild and warring emotions. Then Donna said, "Why didn't you see me again in San Francisco, Rick? And why did you leave me last night and ask me to forget you?" Her hands clenched. She rushed on, "And don't tell me you're—just a

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guy with a swift line, the love-'em-and-leave 'em sort. Because I won't believe you!"

The silence stretched long. Then Rick said heavily, "All right. I guess I'll have to tell you the truth."

After a moment, he continued with a kind of weary simplicity, "I'm a dying man, Donna. Six months ago, the best authority on all tropical diseases gave me a year to live. It's a bug I picked up in the South Pacific during the war."

She caught her breath, staring at him. For a moment, the words didn't mean anything; they were too terrible to comprehend. Her mind and her heart rejected their meaning.

She clutched at words of her own, trying to ward off realization of his.

"Six months ago? Was that when . . ."

Her voice died, and the beat of her heart began to choke her. Her dark-blue eyes were wide and desperate on Rick's tortured face.

He went on, tonelessly, as though the drama of what he was saying was enough, "I'd been feeling a bit rocky, and went in for an examination a few days before the night of the masquerade. Then I met you. I don't know what impulse made me want to keep what happened between us in some secret, magical compartment. Maybe I had a premonition that you could never be anything but one evening of enchantment for me, a love with no past and no future. So, though I told you all about myself, I wanted you to remain a mystery."

He drew in a long breath that seemed to hurt. "Next morning, the doctor phoned me, and—well, he said I'd be in no pain, or even any real discomfort, but that death would come suddenly, and also without pain. But you can understand why I didn't meet you again, or phone you. And why I told you to forget me when I saw you again last night."

So that was it. She wanted to weep under the burden of the secret that she had hungered to know. Yet, painful as the knowledge of Rick's illness was, it was easier to bear than would have been the knowledge that the feeling between them had meant nothing to him.

He was the Rick she had thought him the night of the masquerade—gallant, romantic, but intense and real. The dream was back again, and still the magic was there, however marred by heartbreak.

She touched his lean cheek with gentle fingers, and said, "I love you, Rick."

He stared at her, and there was a strange fear in his green eyes. "You're sure it's love—not pity?"

Donna understood one of the reasons he hadn't told her the truth. His male pride had feared a sacrifice on her part. She whispered, "It's love, Rick. We both knew it was love, that night at the masquerade. Didn't we?"

His face lit up, and his hands caught her shoulders. Then abruptly the light died, and his green eyes were somber. "I can't let this happen, Donna. I can't let you chain yourself to a dying man."

His hands dropped from her shoulders. "Forget me. Find somebody else."

Her mouth set hard. "No."

He shook his head a little, like a person bewildered by pain. "You're young and beautiful. There must be a lot of men—"

She interrupted, "For me, there's only one man. And I want him. Six months or a lifetime. What does it matter? Six months with a man you love is worth fifty years of marriage to anybody else."

Again he stared at her. One expression after another touched his mobile face, it was a kaleidograph of varied emotions. Then, suddenly, his eyes grew quiet, and he began to smile.

He said, like a man finding a place to rest after a long journey, "You mean it. You really do mean it, don't you?"

So might a little boy have asked if there were a Santa Claus; so might a grown

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man have asked if heaven really existed.

Her smile was tremulous, and with an instinct as old as Eve, she said nothing, but lifted her waiting mouth . . .

THE DRIVE to Reno was like a dream. So was their wedding ceremony. But the three days of honeymoon in Reno that followed were an aching reality. Because Donna realized the wonder of their marriage, and was sick with grief every time she thought that it must end so soon.

But she managed to conceal her inner turmoil, and show Rick the gayest, brightest facet of her nature. He was like a boy on vacation, and her heart wept to see his joy. She loved him so much it hurt. She wanted him with her always . . . and knew that was impossible. For her marriage could last only six months. And then . . . Donna shuddered at the realization of how empty life without Rick would be.

The honeymoon ended, and they went back to Monte Vista. There, they rented a small house on a quiet residential street. Donna put her shop in the hands of her most experienced saleswoman, and stayed home to keep house for Rick.

It was a bittersweet happiness to shop for food he liked and cook it appetizingly, to polish the little house until it shone, to tiptoe at her housework and turn the radio low when he was in the room they jokingly called his "den," typing up an article for *The Star*.

It was such a quiet life, really. But it contained all of romance. Getting acquainted with Rick was exciting; finding out the books he liked, and the kind of movies he enjoyed, and the music he preferred dancing to. His nature was complex and fascinating; he had depth and changefulness. He was gentle, but could be dominating at times, with a laughing arrogance that made Donna's heart race. He could make love with the words of a poet . . . then turn on the radio a few minutes later and listen to a prize-fight with boyish enthusiasm. He loved Beethoven—and was mad about the Brooklyn Dodgers and be-bop.

At times, she could forget that her small private heaven was only temporary. Then, with a rush of agony, she'd remember that Rick had only a few more months to live. As the weeks went on, that knowledge became harder and harder to bear.

Then came the horrible day when Rick, emerging from his den unexpectedly found her crumpled in a deep chair, crying. A nostalgic love song on the radio had filled her with that sudden agony of memory.

He stood in the doorway of the living room, staring at her. It was the first time she had ever let him see her cry.

He came over and sat on the loveseat near her chair. His voice was tense, hard, "What's wrong?" The set of his shoulders was defensive.

She looked up at him with tear-drowned

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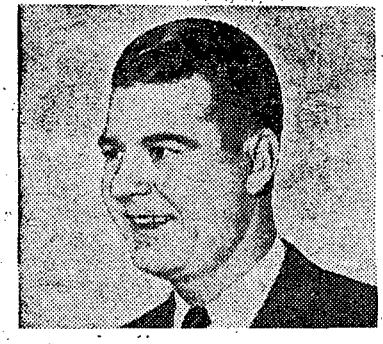

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eyes. She tried to speak, but couldn't. Rick's mouth twisted.

He said, with a kind of dreary hopelessness, "You're crying about me. And that's just what I didn't want." His hands clenched and unclenched spasmodically.

She could not bear the expression on his face. She flung her arms about him. "Darling, I . . ." she began. But she couldn't go on, she was crying again.

His whole body was rigid, and suddenly he pushed her away and walked to a window, standing with his back to her. After a moment, he said, "I was a fool to marry you. I should have left town as soon as I found you lived here." His voice hardened. "Maybe it isn't too late, even now. Perhaps you can still forget me."

"No, no, Rick!" The words were a sob of protest.

He faced her, then, white to the lips. "So we learn to love each other better with each day that passes. And each day the thought of separation grows more horrible, more unbearable. So what's the answer?"

His words seemed to echo in the small room. Donna raised a hand to push back a lock of bronze hair that had fallen down over her forehead. "Don't talk like that," she whispered. "We'll forget about it. We'll just remember how happy we are to be together today, how wonderful all the days of our being together have been."

Again his mouth twisted. "Good old fool's paradise, eh?"

Then, abruptly as he had entered the room, he turned and strode back into his den, closing the door behind him.

Alone, Donna felt weak with grief and strain. She realized that they had passed some tragic milestone. No longer could either of them forget how short a time they were to have with each other. From now on, heartbreak and rebellion would mount with each day that passed. Rebellion against the fate that had not given them long years for their love, instead of just a few unbearably short months.

It was her fault, for letting Rick catch her crying. If there were only some way she could make up for that. If there were only some way she could make him forget the bitter end to which their marriage must eventually come.

Then she caught her breath as a sudden idea struck her. She knew the name and address of Rick's doctor in San Francisco. If only she could go to the city and talk to him . . .

DONNA LEANED across the wide desk, and met Dr. Joseph Martin's kind brown eyes with intense, blue ones.

She said, "I know I'm asking you to lie to one of your patients, doctor. But he would be so much happier if he thought he was going to live for years, instead of just a few more months. Can't you . . ." Her voice broke, the ache in her throat was too much to bear.

The doctor was silent for a moment. Then his slow voice came, "Mrs. Merritt, I—" He paused, bit his lip. Finally he went on, a funny, bitter note in his voice, "It's a hard thing to be a medical man. The decisions you make are matters of life and death. The tools of your trade are human hearts."

Again he stopped. She could tell the struggle that was going on within him by the way his fine mouth set. Then, abruptly, he continued, "Are you staying in San Francisco for any length of time?"

She shook her head. "No. I told Rick I was coming down for a day's shopping. He expects me back on an early bus this evening. I haven't even taken a hotel room."

"I see." He looked down at his slender, skillful hands, clenched together on the desk. He was frowning.

She moistened her lips. "Do you want me to stay here longer? Why?"

He shrugged. "I thought I might phone your husband and have him come down,

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too. Then . . ." His voice died thoughtfully.

She leaned toward him again, eagerly. "You're thinking of going through with my plan? Of telling him that a new medicine has been discovered, which will give him a chance to live? That you'll start him on it immediately?"

He smiled queerly. "Mrs. Merritt, the longer I live, the more faith I have in miracles. Because—there is a new medicine, just discovered by a local scientist. Only a few days ago he told me about it. But it's still in the experimental stage, and he does not wish to try it on human beings yet. It has been successful, to a point, with laboratory animals. He had planned to experiment further before even asking for volunteers—usually men imprisoned for life in the penitentiary—to allow it to be tried upon them, in return for special privileges."

Donna swallowed. "But it *could* work?"

Queerly sad brown eyes met her own. "It is a dangerous serum. You see, it either cures, or—kills immediately."

She caught her breath, while the room seemed to whirl. Then she whispered, "If he were injected with it, he might not live for even those remaining few months you promised him?"

The doctor nodded. "That's it."

Her emotions reeled. This was the greatest decision of her life, and she knew it. She thought of the agonized days which she and Rick would spend together from now on, no longer able to push away the thought of how their marriage would end. Then, abruptly, her slim shoulders squared. She said quietly, "What do you want me to do, doctor?"

SHE WALKED THE FLOOR of the small hotel suite. Rick was on his way to San Francisco. Doctor Martin was remaining in his office tonight to give Rick the injection of serum. Then—she didn't know what would happen then. Everything seemed vague and faraway. Except one burning thought. Rick *could* die from that injection. Doctor Martin said he'd leaped eagerly at the idea of receiving it. But afterward . . . she didn't dare to think about that.

She wanted to put on her coat, and rush to his office. But he had asked her not to. "There'll be no immediate development," he'd warned her. "The serum takes a while to work. Once injected, there's nothing I can do to help or hinder. It will just have to run a natural course. And Rick won't have to be hospitalized. He can come to you at the hotel. Exercise won't hurt him. Nothing will. He can go about his business as usual. Unless . . ." And on that his voice died.

She knew what he meant—that Rick might not live more than a few hours.

## *Portrait*

by S. H. Dewhurst

*Two who all at once have fathomed why*
*There is music even in a sigh,*
*Stand in awe of many wondrous things*
*Made clear to them in Love's sweet whisperings.*

*Only the silent future is with them now,*
*Bright with the promise of their single vow;*
*Theirs is the moon and theirs the budding flower. . .*
*Theirs forever this enchanted hour.*

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Remembering Doctor Martin's tone, Donna shivered uncontrollably. Then, once more she put fear out of her mind. Worry would do no good; it would merely make her incapable of meeting Rick cheerfully when he arrived.

Hours passed, or so it seemed. Looking at her watch, she saw it was only nine o'clock. She phoned the desk, and had a tray sent up. Then she forced herself to eat. The food made her feel a little better.

SHORTLY BEFORE TEN, there was a soft knock on her door. Donna rushed to open it. Rick stood there, tall and smiling. He was a little pale, and his mouth was set, but there was a strange happiness in his eyes. Stepping into the room, he held out his arms to her, and she went to him in a wild little rush. "Oh, darling, *darling!*" she said.

The beat of his heart was ragged against her cheek, but when she looked up at him again, his smile was merry. "Conspiring behind my back, eh? Doc Martin told me all about it. But you seem to have hit the jackpot. A cure!"

Her own heart jerked. Hadn't the doctor warned him he might not live? But the sudden twist of his mouth told her he knew the truth.

He said quietly, "I'm believing it's a cure. If it isn't—well, it won't hurt to hope for a few hours, if that's all we have left."

He was right. She would believe, too. Because if she didn't believe, she couldn't bear these next hours with him.

He laid his cheek against her hair. "Have you had dinner?"

"Yes," she said.

He held her away from him, and smiled down at her. "So have I. And since practical matters are taken care of—how'd you like to go dancing, Mrs. Merritt?"

She caught her breath. "Do you think we should?"

He shrugged. "Doc Martin said I could go about my business as usual, that exercise wouldn't hurt." His voice softened. "And I feel like dancing with my girl."

Her throat ached. But she wouldn't let herself be sad. Resolutely, she smiled up at him.

"I'd love to go dancing," she said.

After that, she lost track of time, and of the places they went. All she saw, really, was Rick's face smiling down at her, all she felt was the arms that held her, all she heard was his voice, soft as the music, or gay as the music.

To the croon of a tango, he said, "Red-haired women are dangerous—and wonderful. I'm glad I married a red-haired woman."

As they swayed to a waltz, he whispered in her ear, "Waltzes always make me think of champagne . . . and the intoxication of your mouth against mine."

And then, to a swift, laughing tune, he chuckled, "Think I'll get a divorce, and marry you again. Imagine marrying a gal like you twice!"

Sudden coldness struck through her at the mention of anything in the future, when the present was all they really had. And then, as suddenly, Rick's arms dropped away from her, and he swayed drunkenly for a moment . . . then his tall body crashed to the floor.

EVERYTHING WAS a crazy blur, with her own voice giving orders. Two men carried Rick to a palm-dotted alcove just to one side of the manager's office. Voice shaking, Donna phoned Doctor Martin at his home immediately.

The doctor said quietly, "Just stay with him, there's nothing you can do besides that. I'll be there right away."

Rick was lying on a long upholstered bench. She pulled a chair up beside him, and took his hand, trying to control her shivering. His hand was warm, and he seemed to be breathing evenly. Or was he breathing at all? She couldn't tell.

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It seemed ages before Doctor Martin arrived. At last the manager ushered him into the little alcove. Quickly, the doctor sat down in the chair Donna vacated for him, and took hold of Rick's wrist. He held it for what seemed a long time, taking his pulse. Then he went on to a more detailed examination, swift and competent.

Donna's heart thudded incredulously as the doctor stood up and turned to her with a smile.

"He'll be all right, Mrs. Merritt. Just a minor complication; nothing to worry about at all. I suppose I should have kept him under observation tonight, but this development was something I didn't expect—and it certainly isn't serious. See, he's opening his eyes now . . ."

THEY were back in the hotel suite. Doctor Martin had left, after making a final examination to assure himself that his previous diagnosis had been correct. And it had been!

They'd turned off the light in the small living room. Rick was sitting in a deep chair near one of the windows, with Donna on his lap. Her head was against his shoulder, and together, dreamily, they looked down at the laughing, changeful lights of San Francisco.

Rick said, a catch in his voice, "It won't stop. It'll go on . . . for years. You and I, loving each other. Working together, and maybe, in a while . . ."

She knew what he meant, and a sweet flush touched her cheeks. She whispered, "I'd love a little boy like you, Rick. Just exactly like you."

He grinned down at her. "Sure you could stand two of us?"

They were talking of the future. Now they could. Tomorrow was hope, not the threat of separation. Joy whirled through Donna like a wild, sweet wind. Her arms stole around Rick's neck, and she drew his dark head down until their lips were nearly meeting.

Then she smiled mischievously, and drew back a little. Without that dark hopelessness hanging over them, they had time for laughter, for flirtation, for the eternal game of love. She teased, "You don't want to kiss me. Red-headed women are dangerous. You might wind up by marrying me."

He chuckled, drawing her close. "I'll take that chance."


# Contrary Heart

**by Val Newell**

**Marky Lewis was going to turn the tables on the incomparable Thorn Sherrill—she was going to get him to hand over his heart with love and kisses, and then she'd throw it in the junk pile with a gay laugh.**

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# Precious Little Schemer

"You say it's *our* ring!" he said incredulously.



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By MILLIE BREECE

***Johnny came to Florida to get away from women, and ran smack into Gay—the girl who knew what she wanted.***

JOHNNY MORSE didn't know the girl's name. And he didn't care. If he never saw her again it would be too soon. And yet he knew he'd have to face her if she didn't leave the dock pretty soon. He was getting hungry and a big six-footer with his appetite couldn't keep bothering forever with the mud on his white slacks—just to keep from facing blue eyes and red lips that could ask the darndest questions ever put to the operator of a sight-seeing boat.



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Johnny flicked another loose cake of mud. "Why don't you go on home?" he asked defiantly.

From the dock above him a husky voice said, "I'm waiting for you to get out of the boat. Because I want to apologize."

"For what?"

"For making you so angry."

That, Johnny thought, was an understatement. Never in the two months he'd been operating one of the little electric sight-seeing boats through the canals and lagoons of beautiful Cypress Gardens, had any passenger raised his temperature the way this nervy little dilly had on this last trip. He wasn't any expert on tropical ferns and flowers. His spiels about them were all prepared by the Gardens' manager, and passengers had the right to ask reasonable questions. But this girl had heckled him until he'd developed blind spots and run the boat aground in a shallow lagoon. He's had to go overboard in the mud to get the boat afloat again.

And now that he'd docked and tied up for the night and the other passengers had gone, here she was, making a mouse out of him! He wasn't going to be any mouse. He got up from his seat in the stern of the boat, stepped up on the dock and looked at her boldly.

If you liked the type, she wasn't bad at all. Short, wavy-brown hair under a blue-turned-up sailor, a complexion that the warm Florida sun had added to, and a figure on the tall and slender side, but not so slender that the soft curves didn't show under her blue gabardine suit.

But Johnny was off girls. So he didn't like her type. And he didn't like her.

He said, "You certainly did your best to make a sap out of me. Why?"

"Asking questions is a weakness. I do it at home and Daddy gets so mad he could beat me. But he—loves me. So he forgives me." She managed a smile, but Johnny could see that her lips were trembling.

Seeing it seemed to melt his anger. Maybe the kid couldn't help being the way she was, any more than he could help being Johnny Morse who wouldn't settle down to a steady job and get married the way his father wanted him to.

"Okay," he said, "if that's the way it is, I'll forgive you, too. And now I've got to run along."

Giving her a smile to prove how generous he was, Johnny strode away: big, with freckles showing on his red-brown neck and the bridge of his nose; big, with fair, ruffled hair and clear brown eyes—and big with satisfaction that his work day was over and he'd handled this last job okay.

By the time he started through the exit turnstile, Johnny was whistling. But the turnstile bumped against something, and he turned his head to see what it was. His whistling stopped abruptly.

*Her!*

SHE SMILED AT HIM brightly. "If you haven't a car, I'd be glad to give you a lift home."

Johnny shot through the turnstile. This was one of those days when everything was going wrong. When he'd started for the Gardens that morning the battery in his second-hand jalopy had been as dead as a battery can get. He'd hitch-hiked to work and he'd planned to get home the same way. But not in *her* car. Oh, no! His strides lengthened.

"Please!" It was a gasp right behind him. "I'm wearing high heels."

"So what?" Johnny growled.

"So I can't keep up with you, and that's my blue Jeepster to your right."

He could hear her breath coming in quick little jerks. It made him feel like a heel.

"Oh, what the hell!" he said mostly to himself and went to the Jeepster.

By the time he'd gotten in and closed the door, she was under the wheel. Johnny looked at her clean-cut profile without ap-

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preciation. He just wasn't interested.

"Now," she said brightly, starting the motor and swinging the car neatly onto the highway, "tell me where to go."

"Straight ahead one mile to Sunset Court. I've got a cottage there."

"You—live there?"

"East Orange, New Jersey. I've been down here for a couple of months. This tourist court is close to the Gardens." He could have said, *I had to get away from dillies like you. I had to get away from Dad who keeps pestering me to take a job in his machine tool factory and settle down to a nice married life. But I don't want to get married. I just want some time to work things out for myself, and not be pushed into them.*

But Johnny didn't say that. He said, "What's your name?"

Her face brightened. "Gay—Gay Chambliss, and you're Johnny Morse."

His eyes widened. "Am I that popular?"

She kept her eyes on the road. "I found out from the boy who sold me a ticket for the first boat ride. You didn't even notice me that trip." She sort of giggled.

"You mean, you rode in my boat—twice?"

"Positively. I liked your voice the first time, and I wanted to talk to you. So I took another trip and asked questions. I guess you could have murdered me . . ." She glanced at him and giggled again.

He certainly could have murdered her. "Here we are," he said a little hoarsely.

She pulled off the highway and stopped at one of the gas pumps in front of the court restaurant. Johnny was out of the car before she had her brake set, and right away he began to feel good again. "Well, thanks for the lift, Gay," he said, flashing her a smile. "Maybe we'll bump into each other again someday." That was the decent thing to say, of course.

She smiled back at him from under amazingly long lashes. "We certainly shall, Johnny."

He would have sworn there was a devilish twinkle in her blue eyes. "Sure, sure!" he said without being sure of anything. Then he turned away and almost ran across the gravel courtyard to his cottage.

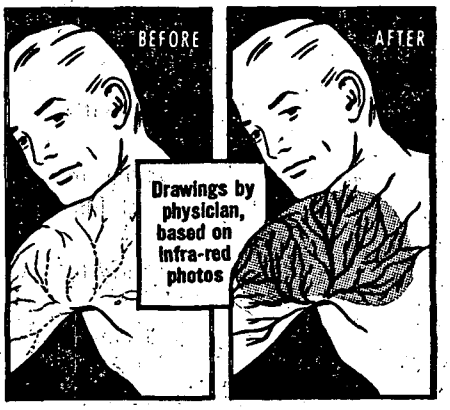
Thrust behind the screen door was a letter from his father. Tearing the envelope open, Johnny whistled. Then he started reading:

*Dear Son:*

*Am enclosing check for five hundred in case you're strapped. Your mother and I miss you a lot. Hope you've thought things over and decided to come home and help out at the factory. I'm not too well and I need you.*

*By the way, Irene Draper will be stopping in to see you about the time you get this letter. She has her faults; but you can tame her, and at twenty-five you ought to be married and . . .*

Johnny said, "Nuts!" and crammed the

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check and letter into his mud-stained slacks pocket, unlocked the door and slammed into his cottage. Why in heck did his father have to keep forever harping about marriage? And why had he or his mother given Irene Draper his address? Creepers! That was one dilly he didn't want any part of.

Not that her father wasn't a swell guy. He was a neighbor and one of Johnny's real friends, and his father's buddy in the first war. But Henry Draper had too much money and he'd lavished it on a motherless, red-headed brat who had the face of an angel and the friendly disposition of a wildcat. All Johnny had to do was look at another girl and he got clawed.

IRENE had done that once too often to him, two months ago. She'd done it at a time when Johnny was trying to make up his mind about a lot of things: about her and about his own future. The war had set him back three years in his studies and he'd just graduated with an engineering degree in February. After that he'd played around New York with Irene and her gay crowd. He'd drunk too much, danced too late, and, disgusted with everything including himself, had packed his bag and caught a Florida-bound train.

In Miami he'd bought an old Chevvy, and—in time—as happens to most tourists, he'd found himself at Cypress Gardens riding in one of the little electric boats, listening to the operator spiel about the traveler palms and the azaleas, and the cypress trees that had been there for a thousand years. It was so darned interesting and peaceful that Johnny had bought another ticket. And before the day was over, Johnny had found himself a new job.

It had been swell. In two months he'd put on some weight. His thoughts were straightening out. And now Irene was coming down with a rope, or something, and the first thing he knew she'd be trying to drag him down a church aisle.

She was a pain in the neck. All girls were in the same category.

Take this one he'd clashed with this afternoon: What was her name? May? Gay! Gay Chambliss! Easy to look at, but creepers, what a persistent dilly! If she once tapped you on the back and said, "You're it for the rest of my life," you would be a gone goose.

Shuddering under his shower, Johnny turned on the hot water full blast. Afterward, he rubbed himself dry with a coarse towel. He was lucky. He'd never see this Gay again. He began to feel better. By the time he'd dressed and walked across the court to the restaurant he was whistling off tune with complete abandon.

Once inside the dining room, Johnny's whistling died away abruptly and he slid to a complete stop. If he'd had the know-how, he'd have turned a back handspring and left the room on a gallop. But he didn't know much about acrobatics. So he moved ahead toward his regular table, and stopped again.

"I thought you'd gone home," he said hoarsely.

"Oh, no, Johnny!" Gay Chambliss said and smiled up at him brightly. "I had to eat, you know. And Mr. Brown, the proprietor, fixed me up with a ducky little cottage right next to yours. Wasn't that sweet of him?"

JOHNNY KNEW that his lips were trying to form words, only he couldn't hear them—just his heavy breathing.

She motioned to the vacant chair facing her—a very airy motion. "Won't you have dinner with me, Johnny?"

"I suppose so," he said with resignation and sank down onto the chair. A guy had to eat. He tried not to look at her, but his eyes kept coming back against all his willing. Then he realized why. She wasn't wearing her blue suit. The thing

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she had on was the palest rose pink with a frilly lace collar. It made him think of peach blossoms he'd seen in northern New Jersey. He shook the thought out of his mind.

"What's the big idea?"

"What is *what* big idea, Johnny?"

"Staying here at Sunset Court. Dressing up as if you were going to a dance, or something."

"Do you like it?" She tilted her gleaming brown head, flicked at the shoulders of her dress just like a woman.

"Sure! But don't sidetrack me, Gay. You shouldn't be staying here overnight. What will your people think? Say—where do you live, anyway?"

He was so disturbed he hadn't noticed the waitress until Gay tapped his foot with hers. Then he managed to order steaks, medium to rare, with French fries, hot biscuits and anything else she had in the kitchen.

After the waitress left, Johnny eyed Gay soberly. In a way she was his responsibility. If it hadn't been for him, she wouldn't be here at Sunset Court. "Now tell me about it," he said firmly.

"Well, I live in Miami. My father is Doctor William Chambliss, the psychiatrist. He's considered very bright." She looked at him as if she expected him to agree.

"If he's so bright," Johnny said, "how come he lets you drive way up here to Winter Haven, invite a guy to eat dinner with you, and stay alone at a tourist court? Why, you can't be eighteen, if that."

"Twenty."

"Well, twenty," he said grudgingly. "What about it?"

"What about what, Johnny?"

He gripped the edge of the table. "About what I've just asked you," he said hoarsely.

"Oh, that!" She giggled again. Then, "You see, Johnny, I'm really a very shy person. But I guess you've known that all along. It's really pathetic, and Daddy says the only way I can overcome it is by extroverting. I mean—by giving my instinctive urges all the exercise possible. So if I want to do anything, I do it. Or if I want anything, I go right after it." She looked at him right steadily.

Johnny had a weak, all-gone feeling inside. No, it couldn't happen to him! She wouldn't want him! If she had any eyes at all she could see that he wasn't husband material.

She said, "You aren't scared or shy—of girls—are you, Johnny?"

She didn't know the half of it. But he knew that unless he asserted himself right now, she might get the wrong idea. "Now, look, Gay!" he said a little too loudly, "I've seen too much of girls to suit me. I came down here to get away from them. I've been very happy here . . . until this afternoon. Do I make myself clear?"

Her eyes misted. She said something, but the words were just a quivery breath. He'd hurt her. He felt just the way he'd feel if he'd kicked a kitten that had rubbed its cheek against his leg.

"I shouldn't have said that," he muttered thickly. "You've been pretty swell about a lot of things, and if you'd like to do it we'll go dancing after dinner. Right?" He managed a weak smile.

Hers was like a sunbeam penetrating a fog. "Oh, Johnny! I'd love it. And you're just too kind to me."

Johnny had a funny feeling inside again. If he weren't such a big brute, he could have shed a happy tear. Instead, he sat there looking at Gay and she had to tell him to start eating his steak.

AN HOUR LATER, with Johnny at the wheel, the blue Jeepster shot out of Sunset Court and sped through the moonlight toward Winter Haven. It hadn't gone a half mile before it seemed to Johnny that Gay was inching closer to him.

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"Isn't it just grand?" she murmured.

Johnny stiffened. "What's so grand?" he asked.

"The moonlight and orange blossoms." She breathed in the fragrance of the night air quite audibly, and snuggled closer.

He endured it as long as he could. Then he said gruffly, "Moonlight and orange blossoms are okay for people who haven't any serious problems to worry about."

"I—I didn't know you were worried, Johnny." Her voice was soft, sympathetic.

"I am just the same. My dad wants me to come home and help him out in the factory."

Gay straightened up and Johnny caught the eager gleam in her blue eyes. "Why, that's just oogley," she said breathlessly. "I thing you should do it. Then you could get married and have a nice little house with chintz curtains in the kitchen windows. I know just how to fix them and—"

"Look!" Johnny said like a cannon booming. "I don't want to get married."

"Oh!" she murmured weakly and he knew she'd sunk as far down in the seat as she could get.

That was telling her. If she had any crazy ideas he had knocked the props from under them.

He began to feel good again, and the feeling lasted until he reached the Haven Hotel and ushered Gay into the big, softly-lighted dance lounge. Twice before he'd looked in; but the desire to dance hadn't been strong enough to hold him there. Now, he was surprised at his own eagerness to have a little fun. Was it because Gay was so darned pretty in her pink dress?

For the first three dances he held her gingerly and managed to keep his talk light and impersonal. But after that, something happened to him. Maybe it was the effect of the stringed music. Maybe it was the occasional contact with Gay's soft, pliant body and the heady fragrance of her gleaming brown hair. Or it could have been one of those instinctive urges she'd mentioned.

But whatever it was that prompted him to do it, Johnny found himself suddenly drawing her hard against him; found his lips brushing her hair. For a long moment she didn't seem to be breathing and he thought he'd carried things too far. Grinning a little sheepishly, he eased up and glanced down into her upturned face. It was the happiest face he'd ever seen.

"Was *I* in heaven, Johnny?" she whispered, and somehow managed to touch his cheek with soft fingertips.

Johnny's heart turned completely over. "I guess the music's stopped," he heard himself saying huskily. "Let's get us a Coke." He led her off the floor in a trance. He'd have to get hold of himself.

BY THE TIME they got back to Sunset Court, he was sure he had everything under control. One slipup was nothing. Not to a man with Johnny's determination. Switching off the ignition, he gave her the keys and a friendly smile.

"Well, Gay, this winds up a pretty full day. I suppose you'll get an early start for Miami in the morning."

"In the morning?" Her eyes were wide. "Oh, no, Johnny. You see, I have a date at Cypress Gardens at eleven."

Johnny felt as if she'd knocked the wind out of him. "Look!" he said. "If you're planning on a third boat trip, forget it. I've got a job to hold down. I can't afford to get angry."

"But you *are* angry." There was hurt in her voice and on her face, too. "And you don't—understand."

"I only understand that tomorrow you should go home."

"Okay, Johnny," she said huskily. "If you don't want me around, I'll go home right after I do it."

"Do what? Run my boat?"

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"Put on a *slalom* exhibition," she murmured. "Just a run out and back."

Johnny sagged back with a sigh of resignation. "Now I've heard everything." He straightened up and glared at her. "You have to be an expert on water skis to do the *slalolm*," he shouted. And then more calmly, "I know you have an urge to do it, Gay. But isn't this trip exercise enough? Why not pack your bag in the morning and run along home like a nice girl?"

He felt sorry for her because she looked so crestfallen.

Raising her face slowly, she started to say something about him not believing her. But her trembling lips didn't put it across. Johnny felt like a perfect heel. And then he did it. His mouth was on hers . . .

He would make it a brief little kiss to cheer her up, something for her to remember. Because she was nice, even if she did have crazy urges. Nice . . . nice . . . her lips were so darned soft . . . melting into his. He had no backbone at all. To hell with a backbone! His arms closing tightly around her, he kissed her with everything he had. It was wonderful!

When he let her go, his heart was pounding like a drum. He had to do something, so he slid out of the car, slammed the door and leaned over it weakly.

"Johnny . . ." she sort of sobbed. "It was heaven. Do it again, p-please."

He shook his head. "No," he said thickly. "Forget it. That was one of those urges. It didn't mean anything. I mean, I've got to get some sleep." He didn't know what he was saying so he turned away and covered the space between the car and his cottage door in a series of flying leaps.

But before he could find his door key he heard her call out softly, "Good night, darling."

Johnny choked out something. He got the door open, darted through it and slammed it shut. Then he sat down on the edge of his bed and mopped his forehead.

*Darling*, she'd called him. Jeepers, what a narrow escape! Or had he escaped?

Johnny didn't know until later the next day.

IN THE MORNING her blue Jeepster was where he'd parked it and her shades were all drawn. She'd probably get up late and drive back home. And in a way he'd miss her. But creepers . . . He'd come down here to get away from girls, hadn't he?

Tossing his muddy slacks on the front seat of his own car, Johnny crossed the court. Ed Brown, the proprietor, was lounging against a gas pump.

Sure! He'd find a way to get Johnny's car over to Winter Haven and have the battery charged and he'd see that the slacks were left at the cleaner's.

"Anything to be of service, Johnny," he added as Johnny put his foot on the starter.

"In that case," Johnny said, "how about sidetracking a certain redhead if she drops in here today? You don't know where I work—or when I'll be back. Okay?"

Ed grinned. He was stout and baldish and smart. "I'm a clam," he said and winked.

Johnny thanked him and started for the road. Just then a car pulled in for gas—Ted Williams, one of the crack skiers at the Gardens. He was tall, dark and friendly.

"Hiya, Johnny!"

"Hiya, Ted! How about a lift out?"

"Hop in, fellow."

Johnny hopped in. He talked shop on the way to the Gardens, and just as Ted parked the car the thing that had been turning over in Johnny's thoughts popped out.

"By the way, Ted. I don't know how to ski, but I guess you have to be pretty sharp to do the *slalom*."

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"Sharp is the word, Johnny. You can break your neck on those marker buoys at forty per hour if you don't have the know how. Say, if you want to see a real expert do her stuff, forget your boat and get an eyeful of the Florida state champ. She goes on at eleven."

Johnny had a funny feeling in the pit of his stomach as he slid off the car seat. *"Not Gay Chambliss."*

"Yeah! Gay Chambliss. And is she a honey! Wow!" He slapped Johnny on the back hard enough to loosen his teeth. "There's a gal I could leave home for. But doggone it, she's hard to date. Say, aren't you feeling so good, fellow?"

"Who, me?" Johnny said in a rattling voice. It didn't sound like his voice at all. Maybe it wasn't his voice. He tried again. "Not so good. Don't believe I'll have any breakfast. And thanks for the lift." He stumbled through the turnstile and barged off toward the boat dock.

Of all the blankety-blank dumb Joes, he was king pin. He should have known that Gay was somebody very special, very different from other girls he'd known. Why, she could have Ted Williams or anybody she wanted by snapping her fingers; but he'd had the crazy idea she wanted him. So he'd bent over backward to fight her off. He didn't know whether to laugh, or to walk off the dock and forget all his troubles.

By that time he knew that he loved her. Even if she were just some crazy little dilly here on vacation, just to snag a man.

But forgetting Gay wasn't easy. By the time the ski show was over, Johnny had had four trips through the canal and the lagoons, and every time he'd docked he'd asked the ticket seller if anybody had been looking for him. No one had. He didn't care a hoot. He'd put Gay Chambliss out of his thoughts.

But just then the loudspeaker announced her exhibition. And before he realized what he was doing, Johnny found himself on the camera platform, breathing hard from the short run, staring at the girl in a red, one-piece swim suit.

IT WAS GAY, all right. Creepers, what a figure!

He had a violent urge to call out to her, but he clammed up. He wanted to wave to her and attract her attention, but he jammed his hands into his pockets. Nuts! She didn't know he was living. She was standing knee-deep in the water, smiling brightly at Ted Williams who was helping with her skis, handing her the tow rope handle.

Ted Williams could drop dead for all Johnny cared!

He moved his eyes away and squinted out over the *slalom* course. To him it looked pretty much like a football field, back at college. It was longer, no doubt, and much narrower with marker buoys for goal posts at the near and far ends, and four off-spaced buoys representing each side line.

He had a sick feeling. Ted had said, "You can break your neck on those marker buoys at forty per hour." But Gay had the know-how or she wouldn't be a champ, would she?

The sudden roar of the tow boat's powerful motor brought Johnny's eyes leaping back in time to see Gay come up on her skis. Her slender brown legs wide and braced, she shot through the opening goal in a smother of flying spray.

Johnny held his breath. Now she was off at an angle, heading for the first marker—a red bird on outspread wings, banking so low around the buoy that her shoulder seemed to graze it. Soaring back so fast across the wake of the boat that Johnny blinked. She made it!

He let out his breath and nudged the man standing beside him. "Pretty smooth. Eh, Mac?" His voice shook slightly.

"You said it!"

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"I know her," Johnny added proudly.

"Oh, yeah?" the man said with utter disbelief in his voice.

Johnny didn't care. His eyes flashed back to Gay. She finished the outgoing run without an error, followed the boat in a wide circle and then came back, still performing like the champ Johnny now knew her to be, like the crowd on the shore knew she was. Because when she came flying in the roar of applause was so great it drowned out the announcer's voice on the loudspeaker.

Johnny didn't care. He jumped up and down shouting, "Gay! Gay!"

She couldn't hear him, of course, or she would have answered. He had to see her. He had to tell her how wonderful she was. But by the time he'd pushed through the crowd, Gay was halfway across the lawn, headed for the dressing rooms. And with her, his hand on her arm and his dark head close to her white cap, was Ted Williams.

"Damn!" Johnny said, and stalked back to his job. She had been handing him a line, no doubt, and forgotten all about him. Well, that was okay with him.

AND YET, by the time the day was over, Johnny was a jittery wreck. He felt so rotten that he didn't try to catch a ride back home, but strode off with his thoughts in a knot. Maybe he'd join the Foreign Legion; maybe he'd get a job with an oil company in Aruba, or Saudi Arabia. Maybe—

"Oh, what the hell!" he muttered. "If it hadn't been for *her* I'd be all right."

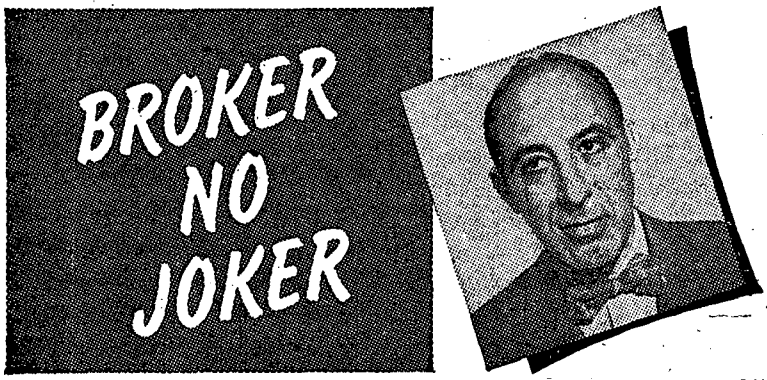
And that was the truth. Gay Chambliss had done something to him, but darned if Johnny could put his finger on the thing she'd done. He should hate her for whatever it was. And yet he found himself practically running the last quarter mile, hoping against hope that a blue Jeepster would be parked in front of the cottage next to his.

It wasn't there! And something came up in his throat choking him. Gay had gone back to Miami. He had a feeling of being alone—more alone than he'd ever been before in his life.

BUT HE WASN'T ALONE. He realized that when his eyes moved listlessly to the strange car parked next to his jalopy. In the car, her red head resting against the seat back, her familiar profile clear-cut against the slanting sun, was the other girl in his life. He'd completely forgotten about her coming.

"Irene!" he shouted and ran toward the car. In a way, it was good to see somebody he knew.

She was through the door in one lithe movement, a *chic* girl in a dove-gray suit and a matching *coif* cap—a glamorous girl with that creamy-white skin that sometimes comes with red hair, with green

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slanting eyes and perfect features.

"Darling!" The next instant she was in his arms and Johnny was kissing her briefly. She tried to kiss him again, but he held her off, grinning awkwardly. "You don't seem very happy to see me, Johnny," she pouted.

He moved away from her, putting his elbow in the car window as if he were fagged out. "Sure, I'm glad to see you, Irene." He would keep this impersonal. "When did you get here?"

"This afternoon. I checked in at the Haven Hotel and rented this U-Drive-It thing. And did I have a time finding this place!" She swept the cottages with disapproving eyes. "The man who runs it is a nitwit, if I've ever seen one." Her green eyes were snapping.

Remembering his talk with Ed Brown that morning, Johnny had an urge to laugh. But he said, "Supposing I dress up and we'll go back to the hotel for dinner. I suppose you're full of news and—"

"I certainly am!" Her tone was crisp. "And I want a good talk with you, Johnny Morse. If you knew how embarrassing it's been for me while you've been down here playing around—"

"I've been working," he interrupted.

"Well, it doesn't matter what you've been doing. I've been having a heck of a time, and I *mean* a heck of a time." Her eyes became amazingly narrow slits. "What do you think the gang's been talking about ever since you ran out on me?"

Johnny felt his face getting hot. "Why should the gang talk? We weren't engaged."

"Oh, no?" she cried out too shrilly. "We've been going steady for ages, haven't we? Everybody took it for granted you'd ask me to marry you. *I* certainly did. You took my time when I could have had other dates. Y-you made love to me, and I thought you meant it and now everybody's laughing at me." Her voice had grown ragged and suddenly she was sobbing brokenly into her handkerchief.

Johnny had never seen Irene cry. He was more accustomed to her sharp tongue. He didn't know what to say. Maybe he had given her a rough deal. Maybe a guy shouldn't go out with the same girl too often. But, after all, she lived next door. She was under his feet half the time. And when he came to think of it, she was the one who always had the bright idea about a date.

Yeah! There were two sides to it. But his mistake had been in tagging along every time she whistled just to keep her from blowing her top. Now she thought she owned him, and maybe everybody else thought the same. So, in a way, he was obligated to marry her. It would be a perpetual dog fight, living with her. But what the heck! Everything had gone wrong since yesterday. So what did it matter?

"Well!" Irene demanded in a choked voice. "Haven't you anything to say?"

Johnny had been gouging out a hunk of sod with the toe of his shoe. He raised his eyes just as something very blue came shooting across the court.

But no! It couldn't be!

BUT IT WAS a blue Jeepster, and Gay Chambliss was driving it!

She pulled up in front of the cottage she'd occupied the night before, and switched off the ignition. Then, turning her brown head quickly, she smiled—a smile that was just the whisper of a song. It came floating across the space between them and pinned itself right on Johnny's heart.

"Could I speak to you, Loverboy?"

*Loverboy!* That was it! That was what she'd done to him! Now he could put his finger on it. She'd made him fall in love with her. He was in love with her; crazily in love with Gay Chambliss.

"Say, what's this?" Irene demanded shrilly. "Of all things! *Loverboy* . . ." Her voice dripped contempt.

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To heck with Irene and her phony claims!

He ignored her, as he broke a record getting to Gay's car.

Jerking the door open he whispered huskily, "Gay—I thought you'd run out on me. I thought you were through with me."

By now Irene had caught up with him, and was staring goggle-eyed at Johnny and Gay.

"No, Johnny," Gay said. "I wasn't through with you. I had to get our engagement ring. See it, Johnny? Isn't it a dream?"

He had her hand in his. The diamond ring on her engagement finger made him dizzy—or something did.

"You say—it's *our* ring?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, Johnny. I had to get it. The *urge*, remember?" She smiled at him, her cheeks very pink. "We're engaged. You tell her, Johnny, right now, or I will." There was a surprising firmness in her voice.

Johnny liked it. He felt like the master of his soul again. Not like a mouse being led down a church aisle by a spoiled, red-headed brat. He turned to Irene, and her eyes were blazing.

"I want you to meet Gay Chambliss, my fiancée," he said. "And now you know why I'm not marrying you."

It wasn't smooth and he'd forgotten to introduce her by name, but she could take it or leave it.

Irene took it. She stood there looking white and stunned, as if he'd knocked the breath out of her. And then he could see it coming fast, her lashes drooping over two pin points of green ice.

"So *she's* the work you've been doing down here," she said violently. "All right. Get married!"

"Now listen, Irene. I—"

"Don't bother to explain," she raged on. "You aren't the only man in East Orange. I can do better any time I snap my fingers. So don't get the idea I care what you do."

She whirled away, slid into her car and went tearing out of the court.

JOHNNY let out his breath and turned back to Gay. He knew he looked a little foolish, but he didn't care. He was free of Irene for the first time in his life, and it was a wonderful feeling.

He said, "Move over, young lady. I want to know what this is all about."

She moved over and he slid under the wheel a little awkwardly. "All right, start firing," she said softly.

Her long lashes started fluttering. "It was this way, Johnny," she murmured as if she were terribly afraid of him—or nervous. "Mr. Brown couldn't find anybody to drive your car over to Winter Haven. So I volunteered right after lunch, and when I took your slacks into the cleaners, the man found a letter and check in the pocket and gave them to me."

She paused and looked at him sadly.

"It was nice of you to take the car over. But what about the ring?"

"I'm coming to that, Johnny. You see, I peeked at the letter. I know it was an awful thing to do. But you know my weakness! I couldn't help myself. And I saw where that—girl was coming. And last night you told me you'd come down here to get away from her—from them—I mean. I was worried sick because I thought you might give in to her because that was what your father wanted. But I didn't want you to be unhappy, Johnny. So when I came back and found *her* waiting for you, I just knew I had to do something."

*"But the ring, Gay!"* Johnny was sitting on pins and needles.

"Isn't it a beauty?"

She put her hand in his again so he could see it; but his eyes clung to her face.

*(Continued on page 127)*

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# Heart in Danger

By DORIS KNIGHT

PART II

To hide her guilt, Linette said quickly, "Hello, Kirk. What on earth are you doing here?"



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***Linette didn't know that kisses from a stranger could change her whole world, or a veil of lies could shatter it.***

**SYNOPSIS**

As LINETTE JOYCE hurried through the thick San Francisco fog to her apartment on Russian Hill, she was haunted by the same fear that had nagged her for days—that someone was following her. She was relieved when KIRK BREEN, her fiancé, pulled up in his car. He had been looking for Linette because he wanted to take her to an art exhibit at the Bohemian Club. It was typical of Kirk to make a last-minute date, and Linette was glad she had to model clothes at CLAIRE McLEAN'S. Kirk became angry, refusing to understand the importance of Linette's modeling job, even though it



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was her only source of income, and paid for her dramatic lessons. Suddenly it occurred to Linette that she wasn't even annoyed at Kirk's apparent lack of anxiety to get married.

But Kirk and his anger were forgotten after Linette arrived at the salon, and was handed a note, left by an unknown person. It was a death threat, which gave no reason or explanation. From then, Linette lived in continuous fear, and she began to suspect everyone in the audience as her would-be murderer, beginning with JEFF GEARY.

She spotted his pleasant, dynamic face and remembered him as the ace columnist of *The Afternoon Graphic*, whom she'd met several times. But when he followed her on her frantic ride home on the Powell Street car, he told her that someone else was following her. Jeff explained that he wanted to feature her in one of his columns, and then noticed the fear in her face. In a panic Linette realized that Jeff, too, had followed her, and that he might be the enemy, so he disappeared into the fog and got to her apartment house, happy to find the front door unlocked.

Once inside the hall, the lights suddenly went out and in another instant she heard someone creeping down the stairs toward her. When the doorbell rang immediately afterward, she was restored to calm, realizing that the person on the stairs must be CLEEVER, the handyman.

The doorbell was ringing sharply and the lights went on, as old Mrs. Bates, the querulous, inquisitive superintendent complainingly opened the door to Jeff, and Linette immediately invited him up to her apartment. She made herself believe that he was sincere in trying to help her, so she told him the whole story and showed him the threatening note. Just then Kirk phoned to apologize for his hastiness, but he heard Jeff's voice announcing the arrival of Mrs. Bates. Just as Linette went to call Kirk back to explain, after the others had left, DERRY TILFORD, her dramatic coach, called with the news that she had gotten the lead in the new play, *Moonlight For Marta*. When she phoned Kirk several times afterward, no one answered, so she went to bed.

But Linette couldn't sleep, and her thoughts wandered back to her childhood in Riverdale with AUNT HESTER and her cousin LINDA, two years older than she. Linette recalled being sent to boarding school the day after the big scandal in Riverdale so that she'd avoid hearing about it—the tragedy concerning JIM CARRINGTON, their next door neighbor, who caused his wife, FELICE, to commit suicide because he'd been involved with a young girl. Her aunt sheltered her more than ever after that, as if she feared Linette might meet the wrong men.

Still unable to sleep, Linette heard a furtive sound that seemed to be a footstep on the loose board in her apartment. At that instant the telephone rang.

She screamed, in a muffled, terrified fashion without any lung power behind the scream. The loose board by the front door creaked again. She couldn't be positive but she was almost sure that she heard the front door open and close again, very softly, as the telephone rang again. . . .

## CHAPTER SIX

### Dangerous as Dynamite

LINETTE FORCED HERSELF to pick up the phone and whisper, "Hello."

The voice that answered her was so unexpected that Linette was shocked out of her terror. It was her cousin Lyn! After three years the faintly mocking tones brought back unpleasant memories. Lyn, the greedy one, who took always, and never gave.

And Linette was not the least bit surprised when Lyn announced that she was coming to spend the night. Or what was left of it—as she put it.

In spite of the fact that there was no love lost between the cousins, Linette told her to come ahead. Tonight she would have been glad to see her worst enemy; anyone for companionship while that dreadful THING was stalking through the building.

She crossed the room and turned on the light switch. The warm glow and sight of familiar objects gave her some reassurance. She drew a long breath and told herself that her fears were imaginary. Gathering her remnants of courage she walked toward the living room, turning on the nearest lamp as she went through the door.

At first glance everything seemed to be in order, but she realized all of a sudden

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that her desk had been moved forward.

Swiftly she crossed the room and bent to look. The center drawer where she kept her most cherished letters was open a fraction of an inch. She jerked it wide, and knew that someone had disturbed the contents. That old love letter, written her so very long ago by a boy in Stanford, certainly had not been on top of the small heap. And the note from Aunt Hester, written just before she died, also had been moved. Linette was sorry anybody else had read it, because the old lady's mind had been wandering. It was full of self-condemnation for something she thought she had done to Linette. Just what this "something" was, Linette never had been able to figure out. But Aunt Hester, writing the confused letter just before her death, seemed to assume that Linette knew all about it.

A more thorough search showed that nothing had been taken from her desk. But nevertheless it gave her an eerie feeling to know that someone had tiptoed about in the dark and examined her letters.

Linette sighed a little, unaware that she had been holding her breath. And then something else caught her attention.

The sugar Mrs. Bates had spilled was still on the floor, and in it was the distinct print of a man's shoe!

The toy lizard, which had terrified the landlady, was gone.

It was an odd thing. Linette discovered she had been shying at shadows for so long, that it was good to have something *definite* to fear; something with substance.

She had been dogged by a faceless, nameless HORROR, and now, all at once, she was faced by a flesh-and-blood man's footprint. A man who was no phantom. Somebody who had somehow gained entrance to her apartment, seemingly for the express purpose of reading her letters!

That made her angry again. Carried along on the tide of the small spurt of courage, she opened the door into the hall and peered out.

The dim globe, high in the ceiling, gave enough light to show that the hallway was empty. She closed the door again, and noticed that something in the way it shut wasn't quite right. She examined the lock and saw that the small button on the side had been pressed down so that the snap lock was not in operation.

So now she knew how the intruder had gained entrance to her apartment. He had been there. He had set the lock on the door so he could slip back in.

Had it been Jeff Geary?

Before she had time for further conjecture the doorbell rang softly and Lyn's well remembered voice called:

"It's me, Linette. Let me in."

LYN HADN'T changed much in three years. Maybe she was a little prettier, a shade more brittle and wise-eyed. She wore a long black velvet coat which curved into her slim waist, and her spun-gold hair fell about her face in ringlets that she was pushing back in a well remembered gesture. She trailed a blond mink stole over one arm.

The cousins looked at each other, but made no effort to kiss. To Linette it was as if she were looking into a mirror at herself—distorted a bit and coarsened. It was fantastic and she loathed it.

Lyn laughed huskily. "I know," she said, stepping straight into Linette's thoughts like an unwelcome visitor. "The resemblance between us is startling. I'm prettier, and you're younger and softer. But we're Joyces, right enough. We could pass for identical twins. Maybe that's why we've hated each other so much."

Words stuck in Linette's throat as she watched her cousin walk across the spilled sugar, crunching it with her expensive sandals, obliterating the man's footprints.

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Astoundingly, Lyn asked in her light way, "Who was the creep, I met on the stairs coming up? He stared at me as if he'd seen a bad dream walking."

*"Creep?"* Linette echoed in an incredulous voice.

Lyn took off her velvet coat and tossed it on the couch along with the mink stole.

"A sort of bent character," she went on to say. "Tall, I think he'd be—if he straightened up. But he didn't. His face was grimy like a bad Negro make-up job. White hair. Baggy clothes—" Lyn paused for breath. "As I say," she concluded, "he—well, sort of glared at me."

Linette's tension relaxed. She said, "Oh, that was Cleever. He's the handyman around here. He *is* sort of weird, isn't he? Mrs. Bates hired him a couple of weeks ago."

For a moment, Linette had thought Lyn might have run into the prowler who had left footsteps in spilled sugar, like a calling card. The preposterous idea also occurred to her that her cousin Lyn might have come here for the express purpose of stamping out those masculine footprints. Perhaps this THING that was dogging her footsteps had gotten hold of Lyn, who always had hated her, to do the spadework for him. The idea seemed fantastic, but logical, too. Anything could happen, she realized.

Lyn broke the strained silence, with a breezy, "Long time no see," and laughed again, nervously. She always spoke in clichés or outmoded expressions. But on her beautiful lips they sounded clever rather than crude; as if she had coined them for her special use.

Linette found herself asking something she hadn't meant to, at all. "Why have you always hated me so much, Lyn?"

Lyn opened her glittering party bag, bringing out a cigarette and a ribbed gold lighter. She let the smoke trail between them before she answered.

"I hated the fact that you had my name and my face," she said, answering frankness with frankness. "Aunt Hester was the only mother I ever knew. *You* were an interloper. A cuckoo in the happy nest. An intruder who looked like *me.*"

She was dangerous as dynamite with the fuse lighted!

"I thought you were in New York," Linette said.

Lyn nodded, eyeing the tip of her cigarette. "I had a one-woman show at the Modern Art Museum a little while ago. I go in for abstract painting, and I always find an angel to back me." She smiled as if she remembered some sort of private joke. "My boy friend came to San Francisco, and I thought it would be fun to fly out and surprise him. I did. The surprise was on me!"

A vicious look came into her beautiful face. "Some *fool* dug up some of my old stuff I did when I was studying at Hopkins, years ago. He got a couple of paintings hung at the current Bohemian Club exhibition!"

She paused for effect and Linette asked innocently, "What's so bad about *that*?"

"Bad? It was fatal! My—friend, who also is my best critic and financial backer, saw the mention in the newspaper. He was *furious.* And no wonder. Do you know what those pictures *were*?"

Again, she stopped dramatically, while Linette waited, for her explanation. She wouldn't let the thought that was beginning to sprout in the back of her mind come into full growth. Not yet. She listened to Lyn's angry words, which tumbled out in their eagerness to be spoken.

"One of those canvases was of Fisherman's Wharf! Did you ever hear of such a hackneyed subject? Fisherman's Wharf, with the fishing boats coming in with their catch, and the fishermen with bright bandanas around their heads. Did you ever hear of anything so—corny?"

She swept on before Linette could speak. "And the other painting was of

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the sand dunes with the lupin in bloom!" She drew a swift, angry breath. "Naturally, my friend, who is president of the Abstract Painters Association, is wild! He says I've prostituted my art, and I agree with him. I thought those paintings were destroyed long ago. I'd given them to someone . . ." Her voice trailed off.

LINETTE REALIZED that she was staring at a small framed photograph of Kirk Breen, set discreetly back on the mahogany table, behind the crimson roses Kirk had sent the day before.

"How did *you* meet Kirk?" Lyn gasped.

And then, Linette was sure. She wondered why the knowledge didn't hurt more.

She said, "I met Kirk this year. We're engaged."

Lyn laughed without mirth. She came over and looked at the great sparkling stone on Linette's finger. She said, "When *I* was engaged to Kirk, he gave me a quarter of a carat diamond in a white gold setting! His father was alive then and the old man held the purse strings. To say he held them tight, would be an understatement."

So far as Linette was concerned, that was the whole story. Lyn made a play for Kirk, and when she found out he couldn't touch his money she threw him over, and went to New York, where there was more opportunity to snare a wealthy husband.

"I suppose you looked Kirk up right away, when you arrived in town?" Linette suggested.

Lyn nodded. "Of course." She smiled reminiscently. "I hope I'm not hurting your feelings, darling, but . . . I think Kirk still is in love with me!"

Linette surprised herself by saying, "I think he is That's the answer to so many things. He was so—surprised when he first met me. He kept staring at me as if he couldn't believe the evidence of his own eyes. I think he selected me as a stand-in for love. Odd concidence, isn't it?"

Lyn yawned frankly, not bothering to mask the small kitten-like pink mouth. "I want to go to bed," she said. "Let's continue this fascinating discussion in the morning."

"Just a moment," Linette put in with a truculence which surprised her. "I want to know something, first. Were you at the exhibit at the Bohemian Club tonight?"

Lyn ground out her cigarette in the fluted brass ashtray. "Of course I was! Think I could miss seeing my pictures on exhibition? Want to know something else? I was proud of those pictures! They were a lot better than those daubs Lanny calls ART! Sure I was there, and Lanny turned up and raised an awful scene! That's why I can't go back to my hotel tonight. Lanny will be ringing me all night long."

Or Kirk will be after her, Linette thought. If she turned Kirk down and humiliated him badly, he'd never forget nor forgive. Now she knew why he was so keen for her to go with him to the Bohemian Club. He wanted to confront Lyn with Linette!

After a small mental struggle, Linette pulled sheets off the bed in her room and made up the bed with fresh linen for Lyn. She laid out a clean nightgown and indicated cold creams, and even an unused toothbrush in a cellophane wrapper.

Instead of thanking her, Lyn laughed. "You sound too dreadfully much like Aunt Hester!" she chuckled. "You certainly were the throwback to the New England side of the family. Me, I'm like my daddy."

As she went into the bedroom, she threw over her shoulder, "I must say our mothers were very silly to name us both Linette after our maternal grandmother. I'm glad I had sense enough to nickname

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myself Lyn very early in the game."

Linette heard her mocking laugh, as she made up the studio couch in the living room.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Linette, Beware!

THE SUN was shining in her face, for she had forgotten to close the Venetian blinds. The table lamp was burning in feeble competition with the light from outside, and for a while Linette wondered where she was.

Then it all came back. With the fog gone and the day bright, her terror of the previous night seemed absurd.

As she hurried about, folding the bedclothes and putting them away in the linen closet, she thought about Lyn and Kirk Breen.

Linette could find no anger in her heart toward Kirk. He hadn't pretended any undying love for her, any more than she had for him. It seemed odd to think of him really in love with anyone. And least of all, in love with selfish, beautiful Lyn.

As she brushed up the sugar from the floor, she decided she'd imagined the man's footprint. Nobody had been in the apartment. Nobody at all.

*But the door was left on the latch, and that silly rubber lizard was gone!* the logical New England part of her mind reproved her.

And all of a sudden she remembered that this was the day she was to try out for that part in the Little Theater production.

She rushed into the shower and then dressed with the speed of a fireman, wondering meanwhile why Lyn didn't stir. But Lyn never had been an early riser.

As she slid into her coat and caught up her purse, she opened the bedroom door. Lyn was rolled up in the bedclothes. Linette decided not to awaken her because she didn't have time to talk. So she closed the bedroom door softly.

In the outside hall she smelled coffee from across the way and was almost faint with longing. There was no time for even a quick cup at the corner drug store. Derry Tilford was not the sort of a man you kept waiting. If she was too late he'd probably give the chance to that odious Marlene Shannan.

She almost collided with Cleever who was toiling up the stairs with a kit of plumber's tools. She was reminded of what Lyn had called him the night before... The Creep. He did look creepy, poor old thing, with his white hair and coal-grimed face and bent body. She never met him, except in these dark halls that Mrs. Bates always kept so dim to save the light bills.

"Good morning, Mr. Cleever," she said cheerfully.

He grunted something by way of reply and then growled in his whining voice, "Is it you that's got the leak in the kitchen sink, Miss Joyce? Somebody telephoned down, and the connection was so bad I didn't get the name."

"It wasn't I," Linette told him hurriedly. And then added, over her shoulder as she raced on downstairs, "My cousin is sleeping, Mr. Cleever. Please don't wake her!"

At the bottom of the last flight of stairs she almost collided with Mrs. Bates, who was returning from the grocery store with a big sack clutched in her arms. She looked at Linette past a paper barricade and cried, "Glad I met you, Linette. Didn't have a chance to tell you last night, 'cause that Jeff Geary was there. But I did something that sort of worried me. Though I guess it must have been all right—since you're *engaged* to him."

Linette asked, "What on earth are you talking about, Mrs. Bates?"

The landlady shifted the groceries

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slightly so she could peer at Linette over the top.

"Mr. Kirk Breen. That's what I'm talking about! I let your fiancé, Mr. Breen, into your apartment about nine-thirty, or maybe it was ten. I never do pay much attention to time. But anyhow, it was last night. He said it would be all right with you. But afterwards, I kind of got to worrying. Because you brought that newspaper man back with you and all."

She droned on, and Linette stopped paying any attention. Her whole attention was centered on the fact that Kirk had been in her apartment the night before.

Kirk! He could have set the latch on her door so he could slip back in. He might have read her letters! Right there, her mind bogged down. She could no more imagine Kirk Breen, of the Hillsborough Breens, reading her letters than she could imagine him doing a strip tease in the Palm Court of the Palace Hotel.

Still—*did* she know Kirk so well?

There was all this stuff about the paintings Lyn had done when she was at the Hopkins School of Art . . .

Linette managed to tell Mrs. Bates that it was all right, and murmuring that she was in an awful rush, she raced off before the landlady could say another word.

ALL THE WAY to the Terminal Building, where she got a train across the Bridge to the University of California in Berkeley, she thought about Kirk and Lyn. She tried to remember when it was that Aunt Hester had allowed Lyn to go to art school in San Francisco. As far as she could remember it was at the very same time Aunt Hester had sent her to boarding school, and it had been on the same short notice.

Fortunately she found a seat on the train. Someone brushed by her going down the aisle, just as a crowd of people came through the vestibule. She hadn't an idea who had jostled her shoulder, but there, lying on her lap was a tiny toy revolver!

She thought at first that a child had dropped it, and she scanned the car. But there was no small boy. Then she looked on her lap again and saw the card under the tiny tin revolver. It was typed in capitals:

DOES THIS REMIND YOU OF ANYTHING?

She knew then, that the revolver had not been dropped by a child. It had been meant for her!

Some of the beauty went out of the day, and some of the safety of crossing to Berkeley, just as she had done hundreds of times in the past, disappeared, to be replaced by terror.

Gingerly she put the revolver in her purse before some inquisitive woman could sit down beside her and ask questions.

It was a good thing she did. For a woman, comfortably fat and middle-aged, with an unimaginative hat and the sort of dress and coat that a woman of small income would select, settled herself in the seat. She had a round box with some knitting in it, which she took out almost immediately.

Then, as her plump fingers made the needles fly, she began to talk.

"Wasn't that an awful thing that happened in Bay Shore last night?" was her opening wedge. "It was all in the newspapers!"

Linette smiled vaguely. That wasn't enough for the woman with the knitting. She went on, "I can't see how a man *could* fall for a sixteen year old girl, when he had a lovely wife of twenty-nine himself. But he said afterwards that the girl told *him* she was twenty! And maybe she did look a lot older. Anyhow she flirted with him till he was about crazy for love of her. She wanted him to divorce

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his wife and marry her! She wouldn't have it any other way. No back street love affair for this proud miss. Oh, no, indeedy. So he *asked* the wife for a divorce. And she killed herself, the wife did."

The woman paused to count stitches.

Linette thought how much it reminded her of the Carringtons who lived next door in Riverdale.

The woman went on, impressively, "His wife's death woke the man up, all right. He felt so horrible he tried to shoot himself! But the gun slipped just as he fired it and it just grazed his head. He went to a sanitarium, I've heard."

They were halting at Goat Island. To Linette's surprised relief, her seat companion hastily jammed her knitting into the round cardboard container and got off, just a second before the train swung into motion to continue across the Bay.

Linette slumped back against the seat feeling oddly limp, as if she'd been through some sort of an ordeal.

SOMEONE TAPPED HER on the shoulder, and she gave a frightened cry. It was a workman with a dinner pail, and the finger, which had stabbed her shoulder to catch her attention, was decidedly grubby. But the man was smiling in a friendly sort of way and shoving a newspaper toward her.

"Couldn't help hearing what that woman was saying," he said. "*I* can't find nothing like what she was telling in this newspaper. Can you?"

Linette didn't look at the newspaper. She said confusedly, "I—I think she was —wasn't quite bright."

The man said. "Here. Take the paper. I'm done with it."

Linette scanned it column by column and nowhere was there any such item as the woman had mentioned!

The train stopped at its first Oakland station, and Linette turned around. The seat behind her was empty!

Alarmed she thought: That woman and that man might have been working together. The woman to tell me that story. The man to prove to me that she had made up the whole thing. But why? It doesn't make sense.

All the way to Berkeley she tried to figure things out. She decided finally that her imagination was running wild. The woman had been mentally unbalanced. That explained *her*. And the man was just what he seemed: A pleasant man on his way to work. Only, Linette's thoughts went on before she could stop them, there was something about him that didn't quite ring true; something that wasn't quite right. Maybe it was the way he *consciously* made mistakes in grammar. As if he had to work at it.

She was glad when the train came to her station.

She walked through the university gates, looking up at the clock on the Campanile. She was thirty minutes late, and Derry Tilford would be furious.

She raced ahead, making the best time she could, with masses of students clogging every path. Finally she reached the Dramatics Building, hurried to the big, empty rehearsal hall. Derry Tilford was there, as she had known he would be—impatient and almost angry.

"I THOUGHT you'd never get here, Linette," he said crisply. "Here. Try this!" He was thrusting a sheaf of typewritten sheets at her. "Read Marta's lines," he added tersely. "I'll feed you the cues."

She began to read mechanically, not paying much attention to the words. But gradually the sense of them crept into her mind, and her voice went tense and her words blurred together. The play was about a girl who was frightened half to death by some intangible thing!

She read on, because acting was her great obsession, and she couldn't fail

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Derry Tilford for giving her this break.

At the end of the first act, she laid the script on the table, feeling utterly sunk.

To her amazement she felt Derry Tilford's arms around her, very warm, very demanding and very much stronger than she would have imagined.

"I *knew* you could do it! Sweetheart, you were slightly terrific! Read the first act like that for the Group and we're *in*!"

Linette drew away from him, too amazed to protest.

He said, "You've known all along, of course, that I'm madly in love with you—the one girl who never gives me a second glance."

She looked down at the huge flashing diamond on her left hand, and said rather foolishly, "I'm engaged."

He shrugged that away as unimportant. "We of the Theater belong together, my dear Linette," he said in his carefully modulated voice.

The pear-shaped tones held a great fascination for her, and she cautioned herself to be careful.

She decided that introducing the subject of business was the best way to evade this unexpected situation. She smiled charmingly, and said, "Right now, shouldn't we go over the play again? And, by the way, just exactly when *do* I read the part for the Group?"

She had touched the right note. Immediately, he was all excitement.

He looked at the clock. "It's time to go, *now*. Leave by the North Gate and walk up to Hawthorne Terrace. The Group meets there. They'll be waiting for you. I'm sorry I can't go over with you, but I have a class in just ten minutes now."

His smile embraced her from head to toes, and Linette hurried toward the door before he could move toward her again. She had reached the door when his melodious voice reached her ears. "Linette, wait! This telegram came for you. I almost forgot."

She took the yellow envelope from him, and managing another meaningless smile, hurried away.

As she walked through the North Gate exit she ripped it open and read the message:

LOOK OUT, NEMO

Her fingers shook as she folded the telegram and thrust it into her purse along with the toy tin revolver. The day had lost more of its beauty, so far as Linette was concerned.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Exit—Two Million Dollars!

THE LITTLE THEATER GROUP was typical. There were the spattering of non-professionals, who provided the

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To get rid of Pin-Worms, these pests must not only be killed, but killed in the large intestine where they live and multiply. That's exactly what Jayne's P-W tablets do . . . and here's how they do it: *First*—a scientific coating carries the tablets into the bowels before they dissolve. *Then*—Jayne's modern, medically-approved ingredient goes right to work—*kills* Pin-Worms quickly and easily.

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money and basked in the reflected grease-paint glow of the acting professionals. There was the Director, who looked as if he'd lived too long, and had seen too much. His eyes, bored and blasé, seemed to despise everybody, including himself. There were the two eager assistant directors, very keen on their jobs, and the handful of too-old or too-young actors and actresses. And, then, there were the two young men who went in for designing stage sets.

All of these, Linette had expected, so her gaze slid over them casually. But there was one person among them she had not expected. Jeff Geary!

Jeff stood out in that group, as a living person stands out in show window filled with wax figures. He was so alive and down to earth.

He came over to her, smiling a welcome. Evidently he did not share her surprise. "The Drama Society let me in on the fact that you're going to read for them today. I'll put it in the *Profile* I'm doing of you in my column tomorrow. So —make your reading good!" He smiled at her warmly.

There wasn't time for more. She was being surrounded by the others, and someone put a script in her hand.

She was nervous at first and her voice almost failed. Then, as the heroine's very real terror crept into her mind, her own fear returned. The breath caught in her throat, and the words came out, blurred and reeking with fright.

At the end of the first act, the Director looked at her with new respect, as he said, "I can see now why Tilford calls you the find of the decade, Miss Joyce. We shall be pleased to launch your stage career in our production of this play. And now, you must meet the backers of our little project, whose generosity has made it possible for us to. . ."

He talked on and on, as did the backers, all of which was meaningless to Linette. She was watching Jeff Geary and wondering what *he* had thought of her dramatic efforts.

She realized suddenly that he was the most exciting person she had ever met, and she wanted his admiration.

The Director was telling her that rehearsals would not start until the following week, and handed her two copies of the play.

In a daze she found herself walking out of the house with Jeff Geary, who murmured, "How about joining me for lunch? I think you were terrific, and the launching of your career as an actress calls for a celebration."

His praise was heady stuff, and she felt color mounting in her cheeks. She said confusedly, striving for the casual note, "I haven't blushed since I was a baby, but a compliment like that, brings the—"

"Roses to your cheeks?" he cut in mockingly "Here's the car. Hop in."

She thought that sometimes he appeared to like her very much, and other times he seemed to despise her. But why?

THEY STOPPED in front of one of the oldest and most exclusive hotels in Berkeley, where the high prices kept the students away.

"This is wonderful, Jeff," she said. "I adore this place. The waiters look as if they'd escaped from one of Dickens' books, and the food is marvelous. But I can't afford to eat here, when *I'm* paying."

Jeff grinned at her in a comradely fashion. "I can't afford it, either," he confessed. "I just wanted to impress you with my disregard of money."

They laughed together, and as they ate, Linette found out things about Jeff Geary. He'd lived all his life in San Francisco, and loved the town. He had wandered about, looking for odd and unusual places and interesting people, from the time he was old enough to go about alone. Gradually the idea for the newspaper column

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had evolved, and it fitted in, since he'd been employed as a copy boy at *The Grapic* when he was in high school.

Suddenly he leaned over and touched the big, gleaming ring Kirk had put on her finger. "Why this?" he asked. "Somehow you don't act like an engaged girl."

She frowned a little. "Sometimes I don't *feel* very—engaged, either. And it bothers me." Before she realized it she said, "I—I'm beginning to think that getting engaged to Kirk was a mistake."

"Why?" he questioned her directly. "Do you think *he's* the one who's been following you around?"

Her fingers played with the edge of her coffee spoon, outlining the end of it, over and over endlessly. "I—don't know, Jeff," she whispered. "It might be Kirk. It might be Mrs. Bates. Or Derry Tilford. Or—*you.*"

"Me!" he yelped as if she'd stuck a pin in him. "Why count me in on your witch hunt?"

She told him about the door which had been put on latch and the spilled sugar and the prowler. She didn't mention Lyn. Somehow, she didn't want to discuss Lyn with anybody, least of all with Jeff Geary.

As she talked, she gained confidence in Jeff. She thought: Here's one man I can trust. I know I can.

So she told him about the warning telegram and the toy revolver. He looked very grave and he asked if he might take them both.

She handed them over. "I don't want to see either of them again," she said with a frightened catch in her voice.

The soft-footed old waiter plodded over with the coffee just then. They were silent while he made a ceremony of filling the small dark blue cups, and they waited till he was out of earshot before Jeff told her she should report the whole affair to the police.

She shook her head. "Not yet, Jeff."

"Why not?" He sounded angry. "Do you want to wait till somebody kills you? Then it's going to be too late!"

She looked at him. "You sound as if you'd *care,* if somebody did kill me," she whispered.

Savagely he said, "You bet your sweet life, I'd care!"

Linette knew this was dangerous ground, but somehow she couldn't help herself. She had to ask the question. It came out in a frightened little whisper. "Why should you care, Jeff? We're just —strangers."

His blue eyes were black with emotion, and he leaned forward and gripped her hand. It happened to be the left hand and the pressure of his fingers forced the diamond into her flesh as if in protest.

"I think you know the answer to that one, Linette," he said implacably. "I've fallen in love with you. Fallen—in the silly, senseless, unreasoning fashion I've always told myself wasn't for me. It doesn't matter two hoots to me that you're engaged to somebody else, and that you're up to your pretty little neck in some murky scandal you claim you don't know a thing about; I'm *in love* with you just the same. Get that?"

Linette kept on looking into his eyes as if she were drowning there, and she loved to drown. She whispered, "It's—fantastic! People don't fall in love this fast! Outside of fairytales, of course . . ."

IT WAS just at that moment that they both looked up, and saw Kirk. Kirk, looking remote and charming and yet definitely surprised.

Linette gave a tiny gasp that was most revealing. It sounded like the utmost in guilt!

She said swiftly, "Hello, Kirk. What on earth are you doing here? Do you know Jeff Geary?"

Jeff looked guilty, too, and he was overcordial to Kirk. "Won't you sit down and have coffee with us?" he invited.

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Kirk sat down.

"Linette," he said crisply, "what under heaven is going on around here? Last night you blurted out some crazy story about someone following you. Later, when I rang you, this—" His nod toward Jeff put Jeff in the very lowest level of human behavior. "This man was with you. Then, I asked you to ring me later and you didn't! And then, about an hour ago at the office, someone rang up and said you two were lunching here and I'd better get right over because your life was in danger!"

"Somebody is out to make as much trouble for me as possible, Kirk," Linette said angrily. "The person must have been spying on me and telephoned to you."

"But after all, you *were* here, weren't you, Linette," Kirk put in mildly.

She countered hotly, "But in no danger at all!"

Kirk's gaze slid over Jeff's face. He said, still being slightly amused by it all, "I'm not so sure, Linette. It strikes me that I walked into the middle of a very intimate scene."

Jeff said frankly, "I was asking Linette to disengage herself from you and get engaged to me. But that has nothing to do with Linette's personal *safety*!"

For the first time, Kirk looked angry. "I'm getting tired of this, Geary!" he snapped. "Get out. I want to talk to Linette."

Jeff stretched slightly, and murmured, "Correct me if I'm wrong. But isn't this *my* luncheon party? And aren't you the interloper?"

There was an ugly, stubborn look on Kirk's face that threatened trouble.

Linette said softly, by way of throwing a small bomb shell, "Lyn is at my place, Kirk. She told me so many things. So I think I'd refrain from calling names if I were you."

She did something else she had no idea of doing. She slipped the big ring from her finger and pushed it across toward Kirk, her crimson fingernail looking very red against the white of the tablecloth.

"I would have done it in private, Kirk," she went on, softly, "but you brought this scene on, you know."

Never had she seen Kirk more furious. His silent anger seemed to reach out like something alive and separate from him, lashing toward them both as he took the ring and put it in his vest pocket.

He said, "As you say, this is no place to discuss private matters. I'm taking this ring. But only because I dislike scenes exceedingly much. I'll contact you later, Linette."

White, pinched lines were on either side of his nose, mute evidence of the fury back of that well-bred mask of a face. He got up unhurriedly, and walked out without a backward glance at either of them, just as the soft-footed old waiter came over to the table to ask if they wanted anything more. His coming broke the tension which had held them bound.

Linette found out that she had been holding her breath.

Jeff looked at the waiter as if he'd never seen him before. "Do we want anything more? No I don't think so. Except the check," he said slowly.

The waiter took out the check and laboriously began adding up the figures.

Jeff said to Linette, "There's still time to run after him to tell him that you were all wrong. A couple of million bucks just walked out that door, you know."

"I know," Linette said.

"I'll never have two million cents," Jeff persisted.

"Are you trying to take back the things you said, now that I'm a free woman?" Linette flung at him. She was on the verge of tears.

Jeff answered her with a brief but demanding kiss. She wanted it to go on and on, but after all they were in a public place, she remembered reluctantly.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### Kisses from a Stranger

THE REST of that afternoon was pure magic. Linette telephoned to Claire McLean, and told her she couldn't be on hand that afternoon. Miss McLean was most gracious, and complimented Linette on her splendid modeling job the night before. She cautioned her to be on time on Monday. McLean's never kept open on Saturday.

Afterward, Linette remembered that... And the way the sun glinted on the placid waters of the Bay as they drove across the Bridge toward San Francisco. Everything else was a sort of blur, punctuated by wild kisses and murmured words of love. They drove through Golden Gate Park and kissed by the Portals of the Past. They parked by the sea just under the Cliff House on the hill above and again Jeff took her in his arms. He was possessive and tender, and for the first time in her life she felt secure.

She thought, I didn't know what love was before this. I didn't know it was an absorbing interest in somebody else. I didn't know that kisses from a stranger could change the whole world for me.

It was only when they came to Fisherman's Wharf at sunset that she was reminded of Lyn. Her cousin's description of the picture she had painted summoned her to Linette's mind.

She didn't want Jeff to meet Lyn. But how could she avoid inviting him in when he took her home.

She was wrestling mentally with the problem presented by her unwelcome guest when Jeff solved it, without knowing that he did.

They were eating freshly boiled crabs dipped in delicious sauce at one of the smaller, less fashionable spots along the row of shellfish eating places, when suddenly Jeff looked at his watch.

"Angel, I've got a date." He grinned down at her. "Nope. Not with a beautiful blonde, nor yet a brunette, or even a redhead. This date is with my boss. So I'm afraid that not even getting engaged to the most glamorous girl in San Francisco can make me miss this particular date—if I want to go on working for *The Graphic*."

He broke off to say, "Look, honeybun, we *are* engaged, aren't we?" in such a worried tone that Linette burst into spontaneous peals of happy laughter.

"Darling, of course, we're engaged," she gasped between laughs. "I'm engaged for the first time, really." She sobered abruptly. "I mean that, dear. Being engaged to Kirk was just wearing his ring. I guess. Certainly it wasn't like this."

He snuggled his lips against hers as if they belonged there. The kiss was so wonderful that she had the sensation of going to the moon on a rocket ship and finding out that the moon was made entirely of soft pink clouds.

When the kiss was over, they looked deep into each other's eyes. Jeff's face was very grave. "Don't ever fail me, Linette," he said huskily. "I'm—betting all my blue chips on you, darling."

On the way home, Linette got a trifle confused about directions, and somehow or other, they landed on Taylor Street, at the bottom of the steep double flight of steps which led to the tall gaunt house above.

Jeff wanted to turn and go up and around the block. But Linette said sternly, "No, you mustn't miss your appointment with the upper brass. How do you expect us to eat after we're married, if you—"

"Married!" Jeff acted as if he'd never heard the word before. Again she was in his arms and the kiss threatened to last forever. Groggily, Linette got out of the car and stumbled up the steps, turning at the top to wave her hand and watch him disappear down the street.

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A stern voice behind her broke the spell. "Miss Linette Joyce?"

Linette blinked. There was unmistakable authority in that voice. The man wore an ordinary business suit, but something about him made Linette think of a uniform.

She gasped, "Yes. But—"

And then suddenly she was aware that there was an extraordinary lot of activity in the quiet, dead end street. A police car. Several automobiles and a—

She gasped, "Is that—a hearse?"

The man pounced on her words. "No. It isn't. But why should you think it is?"

"I don't know," Linette said stupidly.

Mrs. Bates came out just then, confounding Linette by throwing her arms around her and hugging her. "When I saw you lying on that sofa with blood all over your pretty face, I was ready to—"

"What?" Linette gasped, as she wondered if all of them had gone mad.

Then all at once it came to her.

"Lyn!" she gasped. "Something's happened to my cousin Lyn. What was it? Oh, what!"

The man said soothingly. "Your cousin evidently was given a very severe beating. She was wearing one of your dresses and she looks remarkably like you. The idea occurred to me that some—some enemy mistook your cousin for you."

"Is she badly hurt?" Linette cried.

The big car drove off and Linette saw that it was an ambulance instead of a hearse.

"No. She'll be black and blue for a few days. And her face will have to heal." He hesitated a moment. "Her face looked as if it had been clawed by a woman with very long fingernails. Do you have long fingernails, Miss Joyce?" he asked.

Linette showed him her neatly trimmed nails and it was on the tip of her tongue to say that she wore them short so that she could attach the false nails which she wore while modeling.

She slid away from that dangerous conversational topic by asking, "Who are you? And what is your authority to ask all these questions?"

"My name is O'Malley," he said, "and I'm a police inspector."

"Oh . . ."

"Perhaps we could go inside now?" he suggested. "A crowd is beginning to gather."

"You can come into my room," Mrs. Blake suggested eagerly. She added, "Your apartment is all torn up, dearie! Like there was an awful fight."

Linette said, "Oh . . ." again, feeling very sunk.

A few minutes later she followed the policeman into her apartment. It was pretty much of a shambles. Lamps and tables were overturned. Evidently Lyn had put up quite a battle. It made Linette feel silghtly ill to think about it.

The officer got rid of Mrs. Bates by telling her that he'd be down to question her later. Then he picked up some of the overturned chairs.

"Might as well sit down and be comfortable while we talk," he grinned into Linette's frightened face. "This is all a matter of form, you understand. Please tell me everything you can about your cousin."

How could she tell him about Lyn when there was a gap of three years to be accounted for?

Being careful not to let any hint of dislike creep into her voice, she explained about Aunt Hester adopting the two girls. The officer took that in, stolidly, and she went on with her story.

"So you just went off this morning without waking her?" he probed.

"I tell you, I had this appointment with my dramatic teacher at U. C. I knew Lyn would make herself at home and—"

"Your landlady told me you were engaged to Mr. Kirk Breen," he interrupted. "She said you were wearing a big sparkler.

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That right?" He looked at her left hand.

LINETTE PICKED her words very carefully indeed so they came out stilted and sounding completely false. "I was engaged to Kirk. But we had a—a quarrel. I gave him back his ring today."

The officer pounced again. "Your alibi for this afternoon is Jeff Geary, the newspaper man. Where does he come into this?"

Linette decided to lie. "Jeff is just a very good friend of mine."

The man's brows went up a little but he didn't challenge the statement. "Now tell me about this business of somebody following you and you being afraid?"

She wished she hadn't brought that subject up. But she had been so frightened by what had happened to Lyn that in telling her story she'd added the part about the toy revolver and the telegram.

"Somebody has been following me for the past few days," she said, doggedly. "I don't know why. I don't know who it is. But it certainly is serious! My cousin got a beating most evidently intended for *me*!"

"Or you had somebody following you that had made a mistake and was following the wrong cousin," he put in smoothly.

"Oh!" The blank way she said it showed she hadn't thought of that before and the idea was very disturbing. She didn't know what sort of a life Lyn had been leading for the past five years, or what enemies she might have made. She tried to put that into words.

He pounced again. "I judge that you don't approve of your cousin, and you don't like her!"

All at once Linette was emotionally keyed up and very tired. "No," she said. "I don't like her, and I never did. But if you think I'd beat her up or—or claw her face, you're very mistaken! I'm not made like that. I couldn't hurt her! I—" She broke off to ask, "You haven't been lying to me, have you? Lyn isn't—dead?"

He shook his head. "She'll be good as new in a few days." He got up to go. "Where can I find this Jeff Geary?"

"I don't know. He said he had to meet his boss for a conference. Why don't you call *The Graphic*?"

He didn't seem to have heard what she said, because he was looking at her oddly. "Seems pretty funny to me that somebody goes around following you and scaring you half to death and you don't come yelling for the cops. How come?"

She pulled her thoughts back from protecting Jeff and keeping him out of this.

"If I'd yelled for the cops—as you put it—you would have laughed at me. You'd have figured I was just another dizzy publicity-seeking little fool! You wouldn't have done one single thing about it."

He shrugged a little and pursed his lips. "It could have been like that," he said slowly. "Or it could have been that you know who followed you, and why."

She repeated, "I don't know who is following me. I don't know why anyone should want to follow me."

He switched subjects again with an abruptness which made her dizzy. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

The policeman seemed to be thinking aloud. "If that's correct—and I guess it is—then five years ago, you were *fourteen*!"

"Your arithmetic is correct," she said.

"Does the name *Carrington* mean anything to you?" he went on.

Linette was startled, but managed a prompt reply. "There was a family in Riverdale by that name, but I didn't know them well. I only saw the man a few times. and wouldn't know him if I met him on the street. He tried to shoot himself after his wife took her own life."

He said, "Either you're a deep one, or you really don't know what cooks!"

*(Continued on page 128)*

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# It All Adds Up to Love

By SHANNON McKAY

BETTY COLE'S face was still flushed from wrestling with the dinner dishes as she stopped short at the door of the bedroom she shared with her older sister. Francine was just putting the finishing touches to her make-up.

"Aren't you going to teach your night school class?" Betty's violet eyes widened at sight of Francine's new dark green satin date dress, and suddenly she felt drab. At eighteen, Betty had willingly taken over the management of the small apartment, and she really liked it. Then, too, Francine despised housework, and Betty's job as receptionist in a real estate office never tired her as Francine's regular teaching job did. But tonight . . .

Francine smiled brightly at Betty now. "Look, infant, I meant to ask you before, but will you substitute for me this evening? Cora Nelson's throwing a little party, and—"

Betty's cheeks flamed. It was just like Francine to wait until it was too late for her to refuse! "Why didn't you get a regular substitute as you always do?"

***Betty wasn't a good mathematician, but she didn't have to prove that one and one makes one when two people lose themselves in a kiss.***

"I've had one too often of late." Francine's laugh rippled. "Old Mr. Marvin, the president of the school board, would have a fit if he found I'd missed again. He always looks over the records, and—"

"But I can't teach!" Betty wailed.

"Anybody could teach this class tonight," Francine said scornfully. "It's made up of men who quit school too soon, and now they're sorry. They just read history books, and look at maps, and add columns of figures I give them." She straightened the seams of her sheer stockings. "Betty," she went on wheedlingly, "do this for me and I'll do something nice for you someday! And . . . you know the extra pay I get for this night class helps us both."

"I know." Biting her lip, Betty went to the dressing table. "I'll do it, I guess." She was already brushing her brown curls back more severely, deciding against using lipstick. The beige jersey dress she was wearing would do, she thought nervously. "But you know I can't add very well!"

"You can add as well as I when you concentrate. You must rise above that silly feeling of not being able to do things!" She sparkles, Betty thought, with her laughing blue eyes and gold hair! "There's a chap in the class named



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She tried to brush past, but he blocked her way. "I'd like a word with you," he said.



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Tom Johnston who's a whiz at figures." Francine surveyed her own before she flung her pink topper over her shoulders. "You take Tom's answer in the addition. Ninety-nine chances in a hundred it'll be right. You just add along with the class, and pretend you have the same answer as he has, and no one will be the wiser!"

"But I'd be cheating, wouldn't I?"

If Francine could sparkle, she could crackle, too. She whirled on Betty now.

"Tom Johnston's answer will be right! Is it cheating to take the right answer? If you don't want to help me out, Miss Betty Prim, okay! I'll skip Cora Nelson's party. I'll not get a chance to meet Pete Marvin till every other girl in town has pawed him over!"

"Pete Marvin?" He was old Mr. Marvin's grandson and heir. He was twenty-eight, had been a war hero, was a Yale graduate, handsome, single, and the catch of the county if and when he returned home and settled down. Betty and Francine had lived in the town only part of that year, since Francine had got her regular teaching job in Marsdale, but Pete Marvin had become a legend to them both. "Is he—here?"

"He's come home to stay." For once, Francine's voice was flat. "He's going into the bank with his grandfather. But just because you're so mean—"

"Get going!" Betty cried breathlessly. "You're prettier than any other girl in town, and I'm sure you'll get him. But I—I'll never substitute for you again, remember!"

Francine was already at the front door. "I'll have to take the car." She jingled the keys. "It isn't too far for you to walk to the school."

"It's only five long blocks up the hill," Betty said, to a closed door.

"NEVER AGAIN," she thought, slipping into her shabby polo coat, checking that she had her own door key. How could she even begin to teach? As she began the long walk she felt small and foolish and ignorant, for all her high school education. If only . . .

If only she were going to the party! It was May, and there was something soft and sweet in the air. Headlights of cars gleamed in the late dusk, bringing feathery leaves into focus, leaving them dark. "He'd never look at me, anyway," Betty sighed when she finally reached the school house and found the room where Francine had told her she taught.

The class was already assembled. Sitting in seats too small for them was an array of youngish men, all scrubbed clean, all with a sort of anticipatory expression on their faces. From the teacher's desk, Betty smiled at them.

"I'm Miss Cole's sister," she explained. "She is unable to come this evening, so I'm going to substitute for her. If—if you'll just give a steer as to what program to follow, we'll proceed." She felt like a little fool.

A young man with black hair and very blue eyes and white teeth rose from a front seat. "I'm Tom Johnston," he said. "If you want me to, I'll start the history readers around."

"If you please." She sat down, throwing back her coat.

The history readers were on the front seats, and, at a signal from Tom Johnston, each front man started passing them back. There were piles of maps, too, and stacks of paper, with boxes of sharpened pencils ready to be passed back in time. They would be for the arithmetic.

The history reading went smoothly. If a word was difficult to pronounce, Betty pronounced it. If its meaning wasn't clear, she explained it as best she could. Her cheeks burned. She had a feeling of great humiliation, because these men were strong and held jobs, and it was only Fate or a mistake in judgment that had made them leave school too soon. It

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wasn't what they learned here that made them come, she felt sure. It was the spirit of wanting to learn, of being together. And maybe some of them would try to learn more as time went on. Old Mr. Marvin was wise and right in promoting the class.

After history reading, the maps were passed, and they hunted out places in South America. Betty tried to prolong the map study. She felt a little cold as the time for the adding approached. If only they could skip it!

But Tom Johnston was only too eager to get it started. "Miss Cole," he said politely but firmly, "we have just twenty minutes left for our adding. Do you want me to pass the paper and pencils?"

"If you please." Betty smiled.

"You call off the numbers, you know," Tom explained, "and add along with us. She gives us a long column of numbers like seventy-four, ninety-eight, twenty-nine and so on. Get it?"

"Yes." Betty's fingers were icy as she grasped a pencil and began to write down numbers as she called them off at random. Finally, she drew a heavy line under hers and announced, "Begin to add!"

There was only the sound of breathing. Then, before she had finished, there was a snap of fingers. Looking up, she saw Tom Johnston was through. "Finished?" she asked evenly.

"Yep." He glanced around the room triumphantly. "Shall I give my answer?"

"Yes." He gave it.

"Correct," Betty said. She had to say it. She had to take a chance. They believed she could do it, didn't they? She mustn't let them down. But never, without a long, long struggle, and counting on her fingers, too, could she arrive at any answer at all.

"How many got it right?" There were sheepish grins, shakes of heads. Through a kind of blur she saw a tall young man with taffy-colored hair and wide shoulders come into the room and make his way to a back seat. Then he looked straight at her, with the blackest eyes she'd ever seen.

With an almost physical effort, she drew her gaze away. Black eyes could be dominant, black eyes could smile just a tiny bit deep into yours, and make you know you were a girl. The lift of a dark eyebrow could let you know you were being sized up,—maybe cynically?

It didn't matter. "We'll try again," she said. "Ready to add, everybody?"

There was the same giving of numbers, the same breathless time of effort, the same snapping of Tom Johnston's fingers before she'd gotten an answer.

"What do you get, Mr. Johnston?" She might as well have it over with, fast.

He gave his answer.

"Correct," Betty said. "How many—"

"That answer isn't correct," the owner of the black eyes said.

Her heart beat suffocatingly. How dared he contradict her?

"It is correct," she said.

The black eyes held hers again, mockingly this time, scornfully. Then the young man got up and walked out of the room.

BETTY KEPT looking straight ahead. Tom Johnston remarked, "Who does that guy think he is? He never came here before."

Betty didn't know who he was, nor care. She was only glad it was time for the class to be dismissed, that somewhere in the building a bell was ringing. Surreptitiously, as the class filed out, she slipped her own papers into her purse, though she smiled at each one as he said heartily, "Good night, Miss Cole."

Betty liked them, but she was more relieved than she'd admit even to herself that her ordeal was over.

But it wasn't over. When finally she left the room, she found the tall black-

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eyed man lounging just outside the door. She tried to brush past him, but he blocked her way. In the glaring hall light his strong-featured face was stern, hard. "I'd like a word with you," he said gruffly, but even the gruffness in his voice couldn't conceal its low, throbbing quality.

She turned to ice. "We have nothing to say to each other."

"But I have something to say to you." He towered grimly over her. "What kind of teacher are you, anyway? You pulled a fast one, taking the answer that the black-haired Romeo gave, and anybody with half an ounce of sense could see you were bluffing. That answer was wrong. Don't you know it? Can't you add?"

"N—Yes!"

"Then you were too lazy to add those figures, or you made a mistake for once. What gets me is that those fellows believe in you, think you know more than they do. It's a gyp. How did you ever get to be a teacher anyway?"

She despised him. She wanted to tell him she wasn't a teacher, that lots of girls couldn't add long columns fast. But this —this inquisitor was so nervy he'd probably report her to the school board, thinking she was Francine, if she didn't try to placate him. If she played up to him . . .

Her eyes widened. "Are you a stranger in town?"

"What's that got to do with it?" he snapped down at her. "Here." He handed her a piece of paper. "In your spare time, you might check over my addition of the numbers you gave out. You'll see that I'm right."

Furiously she crumpled the paper and thrust it into her coat pocket. "You big bully—" Crazily she burst into tears.

"What the—" His voice softened. "I didn't mean to scold you, baby! It's just that—"

"I wish you'd let me alone!" She tried again to brush past him, but he caught her arm. "Take this." He thrust a white handkerchief into her hand. "Of all the little nit-wits—"

"I'm *not*. I hate you!" She couldn't stop crying. "Just g—go!"

There was another warning bell, and the lights went out. Suddenly it was pitch dark in the big hall. "We'll have to run for it or we'll be locked in." His voice held laughter as he put his arm around her. Then he was half carrying her down the stairs and out the front door.

"Now go!" she flamed, and started blindly down the street.

"But you can't go home alone, and crying!"

"I'm all right!"

"I'll drive you home." Grasping her arm firmly he urged her to a big car at the curb, and into it. Running around quickly, he slammed the door shut and put the car in gear. A moment later, it roared off. "Where to?" he demanded gruffly, the laughter gone.

"Down the hill five blocks and then left to the apartment house." She sank back in the seat. Crazily the tears were still coming. What ailed her?

He slowed down at the intersection. "Still at it?" he asked crisply.

"N-no!" She covered her face with her hands and choked on the sobs. She knew she was a little fool, but his tone cut right through her, and her head ached, and she hadn't done right. He was so persistent Francine might get into trouble, and . . .

"Now tell me what this is all about!" He'd stopped the car. Looking up, she realized he hadn't turned left, but right, toward the public park, and had stopped there now in the shadow of a big tree.

THE VAGUE THOUGHT came to her again that she should try to win him over, so that he wouldn't report her. She said, "I—I guess I'm lonesome."

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And she was. Terribly. What with the spring and all . . .

"Maybe I can fix that." His voice had an odd tone. Mocking? Scornful? She didn't know, nor care very much.

"How?" she asked.

"Like this," he said, and put his arms around her and set his lips to hers.

Her defenses were down, and she went soft as the spring. His lips were firm and hard and mocking at first, then strangely gentle. There was something lovely and ethereal about the kiss, as though it were different from all the other kisses in the world. As though it had come deep from their hearts.

Hers was beating suffocatingly when he let her go. She felt on tip-toe, as if she had touched the stars. She was trembling, but she felt strangely older. He said nothing, and she saw his profile by the dashboard light, straight and clean-cut. He turned on the ignition.

"I—don't even know your name," she whispered. She had a queer feeling that speaking aloud might break the spell that had come over her with the kiss, the spell that must surely have touched him, too.

"Pete Marvin," he said briefly. "I know yours. It's Francine Cole. My grandfather told me about your class at night school. I—just stopped in at his request, though I was on my way to a party. Now, I don't—"

She was cold as ice. "You're *Pete Marvin?*"

"Yep. What of it?" He turned and looked at her. "Francine, I—"

"Don't 'Francine' me!" Her laughter was brittle. "You spied on me. You made a fool of me, and now you'll report me to your grandfather, and—" She wasn't thinking of herself. She was thinking of Francine. Any way you took it, Francine would be in trouble. And she didn't dare say, now, that she wasn't Francine.

His voice came puzzled, very low. "Are you . . . sorry about the kiss?"

"Yes! Why wouldn't I be? I was just nervous and upset, and you—thought you would try me out." Was she crazy? Not for anything in the world would she let him know she'd been stirred deeply, that she still felt wretchedly rocky.

"Look, baby—"

"Don't *baby* me!"

"Look!" He started again. "I'll take you home, and—"

"And I hope, as long as I live, I'll never see you again."

"Ditto!"

He turned the car in a big arc and drove her home.

Francine, in slacks and heavy sweater, was pacing the sidewalk outside the apartment. When Betty jumped from the car, Francine ran to her.

"Baby, where have you been?" she demanded. "I stopped at the school but it was dark, then got here and found you weren't home. Did you hold class? Who is this man?"

"I taught," Betty cried. She realized Pete Marvin was standing stiff and straight beside her. She held her brown head high. "This is Pete Marvin," she choked. "He attended class. He doesn't know I'm not you," she added in a whisper, and ran into the apartment. Let Francine work things out her own way. At least, she was meeting the catch of the county.

Betty despised him. Spying on her, criticising her, kissing her! The only thing she was glad of was that Francine had him in tow. Francine could twist him around her little finger.

Through the closed bedroom door, she could hear voices. Francine evidently was winning Pete Marvin over. Maybe she'd tell him the truth, that she'd wanted so badly to meet him she'd had Betty act as substitute for her. He'd be flattered and think Francine was cute. But he'd never forgive Betty for saying a problem was correct when it wasn't, even if he had

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kissed her to make her stop crying. He'd think her a cheat.

It didn't matter. For something to do, Betty took her papers and painstakingly added the numbers, then compared her result with the sum on the crumpled sheet of paper Pete Marvin had thrust into her hands. He'd been right.

She despised Pete Marvin.

WHEN FINALLY HE went home, and Francine came into the bedroom, Betty pretended to be asleep. But Francine, turning on the bright lights, asked urgently, "Betty, are you awake?"

Betty sat up. "I'm awake now." She pretended to stifle a yawn.

"Isn't he wonderful?" Francine's eyes were shining. "I left the party because it was flat without him, and luckily I was right here to meet him. He's dated me for Saturday night. That's tomorrow, isn't it? And for Sunday night, too. What do you think of that?"

Betty drew a tight little breath. "What am I supposed to think?"

"Well," Francine laughed, "he's pretty nice!"

"Did you tell him you're the teacher? That I was just a sub?"

"But of course!" Francine carefully put drops in her eyes. "I explained everything. I told him I'd had a headache and had sent you in my place at the last minute. And he promised not to tell his grandfather a thing about it. Wasn't that sweet?"

"Very." Betty sank wearily back on her pillow. "But I like things straight."

"Then go straight to sleep." Francine was humming as she brushed her hair.

Betty turned her face to the wall and closed her eyes tight. Had he told Francine anything about her teaching? Surely not. And no doubt he'd forgotten her, as she'd forgotten him.

When he came to see Francine, she'd avoid him.

It wasn't hard. When Pete called for Francine the next evening, Betty stayed in the bedroom with the door closed. It was the same Sunday evening, though it was harder this time, for she thought they'd never leave. But after a long while they did, with Francine's gay laughter trailing back. Betty ran and peeped from the living room window after they were gone, and saw the big car gliding off.

Would he kiss Francine?

Let him, if he wanted to. Francine knew better than to kiss him back as though she were crazy in love with him. Francine never let anyone know how she really felt.

But Francine was terribly silent when she came home Sunday night. It was almost as if she hadn't had a good time. Betty, pretending to be asleep, wouldn't ask her for the world. She really wasn't interested.

When Francine's silence kept up even Monday evening, Betty was really worried. But she had no idea Francine didn't feel well until it was time for her to go to teach her class. It was then that Francine, a wet towel on her forehead, came into the kitchenette.

"Darling," she wailed, "I can't teach tonight. One of my real headaches has come on, and I simply can't stand up. You'll have to substitute for me again!" She sank onto a chair.

"But I can't!" Betty cried. "I made such a flop of it!"

"You did all right. Pete explained that none of the class knew you were bluffing, and—"

"Oh, he did? It's too bad he had nothing better to talk about. I thought he liked you!"

"He does, baby. But—are you going to teach for me or not? It's too late to call anybody else, and the class is waiting."

Betty felt white. "Okay." She was on her way for her coat. "I'm sorry, Fran-

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nie, I hope your headache gets better."

"Thanks, baby." Francine smiled wanly. "The car keys are on the table."

"I'll walk."

Going up the hill, her hands clenched tightly in her coat pockets, Betty felt terribly alone. She realized suddenly, starkly, that she'd felt that way for a long time, and the only time she hadn't felt that way was when Pete Marvin had kissed her. Then, briefly, sweetly, achingly, she'd felt as if she belonged to someone.

She stopped dead still. It had been like being loved. And it had been like giving love back when she'd responded to Pete's kiss.

Only, to her it had been real. She felt ice-cold. She was in love with Pete Marvin. She'd fought the realization, fought with him, avoided him. But she loved him.

Black eyes seemed to mock her, to scorn her. She'd been unfair with him and with her pupils, and he'd had a right to scold her in the first place. And he'd been gentle afterwards, and had tried to cheer her up. But when she'd learned who he was, she'd said unforgiveable, unfair things to him. She knew now he hadn't come to the class to spy, but at his grandfather's request! He was fine, straight. She loved him.

Drawing a long, hurting breath, she went on. She wasn't worthy to face her men-boy pupils, or to love Pete.

SHE FOUND THE class assembled. Smiling at it blindly, she made a little speech. It was when she was finished, when she'd said she was sorry she hadn't been honest with them, that she saw Pete Marvin sitting in the back seat, his black eyes bright on hers.

"I'm sorry about everything," she heard herself saying directly to him, her own eyes drowning in black, glistening pools. "I was wrong." She tore her eyes away. "Now we'd better begin," she said.

The room was terribly quiet. The history reading went on, the map study followed, and then Betty gave out numbers to be added. Queerly, her mind was very clear. Oddly, she could concentrate and add swiftly, and, she was sure, correctly. She'd risen above something. Her love had made her strong.

There was the snapping of fingers just as she'd finished. She looked up. "Your answer, Mr. Johnston?"

He gave it. It was the same as hers.

"Correct," she said.

The dismissal bell was ringing. As the class quickly filed out, they all smiled.

The last to leave was Pete Marvin.

Only, he wasn't leaving. He was standing by the door, waiting for her.

Drawing a deep breath, she walked toward him. Unbelievably, he opened his arms and she threw herself into them, and was crazily crying on his shoulder.

He mopped her tears gently with a big handkerchief. "Baby, you came through," he said gruffly. "My baby."

"But—Francine?"

"I dated her first because I was furious with you. But the longer I thought about it, the more I remembered that kiss, and I realized I'd really fallen in love with you. So I spilled everything to Francine, because I needed her help to get near you."

"Then her headache was faked?"

"Yep." Pete grinned. Then he said "Darling—" His voice shook. "Will you forgive me for the unkind things I said? I'm in love with you."

She was trembling. "I love you, too. I think it started with the kiss. It all adds up to love, anyway."

He kissed her. "One and one make one, when there are wedding bells," he said raggedly. "Want to try it?"

"Y-yes, to prove it's c-correct." The lights went out suddenly and he kissed her again.

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# PIN-UP Beauty Secrets

By LYNNE SVEC

NO TWO FACES in the world are exactly alike. *Vive la difference,* as the French say and as all beauty-appreciative people would agree. For then you have the variety that spices life on the beauty horizon.

However, women with irregularity of facial contour have a different song to sing. It would be wonderful to have a perfect face and let somebody else have the too-round face, long nose or protruding forehead.

But with the proper application of makeup, and with certain other beauty tricks up your sleeve, you can create the beautiful illusion of perfect facial contours.

Consider your face type when you apply makeup. If your face is small, your makeup should be light. This same rule applies to women with dark skins. The reason for this is that the lighter makeup will highlight your features instead of minimizing them. The reverse is true, if your face is round. For a slightly darker makeup will create an optical illusion, thereby making certain features look smaller.

Next, give some thought to your skin tone. If it is ruddy or rosy, you'll want to wear a makeup base and powder that carry a cream or beige undertone. Your lipstick and rouge should be in the true red range. But if your skin tone is sallow or olive, you'll find a pink or rose base and powder the best for you. The perfect lipstick and rouge will be in the blue-red range. And buy two shades of powder—one dark, for daytime wear—one light, for evening. Learn how to use both powders at the same time. The light to "play up" your good features; the dark to "play down" your bad.

If you have a *round face,* shadow the outside of each cheek with your darker powder. You'll be surprised to find how much thinner your face will look.

A triangular *heart-shaped* face problem can best be solved by applying your light powder to the jaws on each side of your chin. The chin itself should have an application of dark powder.

If, however, you are troubled because you have an *oblong* face, use your dark powder on the face and chin area—a few inches below your mouth.

A *square,* "block" face can be softened and rounded, if you will apply your dark powder down from the cheekbone to the point of the chin.

For the *inverted triangular* face—since it is most important for you to reduce the size of your jawline, apply a darker powder to both the jawline and the lower part of the cheeks.

Give the thin neck or receding chin a coat of foundation and powder which is a tone lighter than the skin. A thick neck or a prominent or sagging chin calls for a base and powder which is the skin color.



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Whether your problem feature is a full forehead, broad jaws or a flaw already mentioned, follow this general rule for makeup: To increase the apparent size of a feature use a lighter shade than your natural skin tone. Otherwise use a color which matches your skin. Never use a foundation darker than your complexion if you would avoid a painted effect—except in cases where minimizing must take place, in which instance great care must be taken in blending the darker shade in with the lighter tone of foundation and face powder.

To minimize a large or prominent nose, you'll need two tones of foundation make-up. On your cheeks use that which is a tone lighter than your skin. Blend the base matching your skin over the nose and the outer cheek area. This gives an illusion of fuller cheeks and directs attention away from the offending feature. Do not start rouge too close to the nose.

For a short, flat nose use a lighter-than-skin-tone foundation down the center to the tip. On the sides of the nose smooth a foundation which matches your coloring.

You've still other beauty tricks at your command with *rouge application*. If your face is *oval*—keep the rouge higher than the middle of the cheek. Apply it out toward the hairline.

If your face is *oblong* apply color as far out as possible on the cheeks. Keep it back near the hairline.

If your face is *triangular*, start the rouge at the bottom of the cheekbone. Carry it down into the cheek and shade lightly away to the jawline.

For a *point-down triangular* face, start the color beyond the outside corner of your eye. Blend out toward the hairline, under the eye, down to the middle of outside cheek.

If you have a *round* face, start the rouge near the hairline, higher than the middle of your ear. Blend toward the nose, being careful not to bring it below the nostril point.

And if yours is a *square* face, start the color up and out near the ears, keeping it way out toward the jawline. Blend it down under the lower cheek, shading off into nothing at the jawline.

DON'T NEGLECT the shape of your eyebrows in highlighting the importance of your eyes. There is a perfect shape of brow for all shape faces. Square and oblong faces are ovalized by a brow that has a natural rounded arch. The gentle roundness of the arch softens and minimizes all the square corners of the face, the jaw, the cheekbone and the forehead.

It's easy to see how a rounded eyebrow will succeed only in accentuating the curved lines of a round face. A satisfactory correction in this case is a brow that slopes to a peak and comes down gradually again at the far corner of the eye.

A brow that starts low at the inner corner of the eye and rises to its highest point over the outer corner suits the diamond face because it draws attention away from wide cheek bones.

The pointed chin always found in the triangular face can be very successfully contradicted by brows that are almost straight across. A word of warning in all brow-shaping: Brows plucked to a thin, hard line are unbecoming and out of style—merely pluck stray hairs which detract from the brow line you want to create.

Eye shadow too can create illusions of perfection: If your eyes are too close together, place the shadow farther out. Begin at outer corner of lid, blend up and out to the end of the eyebrow. If your eyes are too prominent, make them recede by using brown or gray shadow over entire lid. Begin with thin line near lashes; spread up.

Your mouth, too, is what you make it,

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*Sally was a managing woman, who had to learn the hard way that a clinging vine is the best love tonic for a he-man.*

# Crossed Fingers for Cupid

By SHELBY STEGER

"I—I PROMISE, darling." Sally Evans' clear voice rang with sincerity, but her slim fingers were crossed in her lap, which was hidden by the white tablecloth.

"That's my good girl." Jim Harrell's square, tanned face beamed across the table of the smart Peacock Room. "I know that you only lunched with that old dodo today because you hoped you could talk him into advancing the stock for a gift shop for Aunt Lili. But I'm jealous." He paused to give her his lopsided grin. "I can't stand to see you with other men, even if they're old and bald and it's only business. You won't do it again, will you, darling?"

Tightening her crossed fingers, Sally nodded her gleaming red head. Actually, though, she supposed she might as well face it: Aunt Lili Clement was suited only to being a rich man's wife, which she no longer was, since her husband's death. Astonishingly, frighteningly, David Clement's estate had consisted of nothing more than the old mansion. It had been Sally who insisted that Aunt Lili turn it into a boarding house. Unfortunately, Aunt Lili was completely incapable of coping with the myriad details involved in such a precarious occupation.

Sally Evans had tried and tried to get Aunt Lili into some other business, but it was no good. The fancy bakery had acclaimed Aunt Lili's coconut-marshmallow cake as delicious—but it took her all day to make one, in a sticky shambles of a kitchen which made Mary, the cook, threaten to leave. The toy distributor had regretted that Aunt Lili's cute cotton-stuffed bunnies couldn't be made in sufficient quantity to be commercially worthwhile. The Baby Shoppe had pointed out that the tiny, elaborate frock it took Aunt Lili two weeks to make couldn't be sold for enough to pay for her time.

And today at noon, in the dining room right here in the Tower Hotel, a bald-headed Mr. Grant had explained that he could not possibly consider stocking a gift shop for Aunt Lili on consignment. It was a shame that Jim had been at the big table where his businessmen's luncheon group met weekly, that he had glanced up to discover Sally just as Mr. Grant was softening his flat "No" by patting her hand . . .

"I promise, Jim," she said now. "I'll be absolutely relentless until Aunt Lili can run the boarding house herself. I'll make her study that big book of mine, the one that tells you how to do everything about a house, from drying a damp basement to patching the roof. And then, when Aunt Lili's quite self-sufficient and



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established, we'll set a wedding date."

Her green eyes misted as she thought how heavenly it would be to be married to Jim Hallett. Darling, stubborn, wonderful Jim! Jealous, yes—but it was rather nice for a man to love you so much he couldn't bear to see you with someone else!

Jim was handsome, too, with his clear blue eyes, nice straight nose, and strong, square chin. His close-cropped sandy hair was always tumbled, she mused fondly; it looked just as attractive that way with dinner clothes as with the jumpers he wore at his garage and service station across the street from Aunt Lili's big house.

Sally remembered the wealthy boys she used to date, back in the old days before Uncle Dave's death had disclosed the fact that he wasn't, after all, a rich man. They had been fun, the playboys, but there wasn't one of them worth Jim Harrell's little finger—even if that finger, like the other nine, was faintly stained with grease that hard scrubbing wouldn't quite remove.

Jim was no playboy; he was a worker, a man. His own man . . .

"You're a wee bit bossy, my sweet, inclined to think no one but you can do things," Jim went on thoughtfully. "You spoil Aunt Lili. If you'd leave her on her own, she might have to grow up."

Sally doubted it, but . . .

"Tomorrow I'll start the domestic education of Aunt Lili in earnest," she smiled, and wrinkled her pert little nose at him. "And now, you invited me to go dancing, I believe."

THE MUSIC WAS soft and pulsing; it might have been played for them alone. And to be in Jim's strong arms was sheer bliss. How soon, Sally wondered, could she convince Aunt Lili that life could be no more the thing of luxury and ease it had been? Sally could not, in decency, abandon her aunt. Jim would not wait forever—he had been very patient. *Soon*; she prayed, *oh, very soon, please* . . .

Idly she noticed a man, seated alone at a table, whose dark piercing gaze lingered on her. His hair was silvery, he had a handsome, even-featured face. He didn't flirt, but seemed rather to memorize every line of Sally's provocative slimness. Used to admiration, Sally merely hoped that Jim wouldn't notice the stranger's interest. Sweet, silly, jealous Jim!

The dancing was over and Sally stood waiting in the hotel lobby while Jim returned to the Peacock Room to retrieve his cigarette case from the table.

She gazed at the large placard on an easel near the entrance which announced a style show tomorrow, in the hotel's Gold Room.

FASHIONS BY LEON DARLIER
OF PARIS AND NEW YORK

Aunt Lili adored clothes, Sally thought wistfully; in the old days nothing would have kept her from this fashion show. Now, though she made all of Sally's lovely things, her own wardrobe consisted mostly of the crisply ruffled housedresses she wore in the boarding-house. *Poor Aunt Lili* . . .

"May I speak to you?" The deep masculine voice was very close behind her.

Startled, Sally turned. It was the silvery-haired man with the searching dark eyes. *Oh, dear*! If Jim should return before she got rid of this wolf . . .

"Who is your dressmaker, please?" he asked curtly.

Sally smoothed the gray chiffon on which coppery autumn leaves, the color of her bright hair, drifted down from one shoulder to float and scatter about the billowing fullness of the skirt.

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"My aunt, Lili Clement. She even painted the leaves."

"Very clever." The dark eyes studied the dress. "She has done other costumes for you?"

"Oh, yes, she makes all my clothes."

"I am Darlier, the designer," the handsome man said gravely. "I'd like to see more of Mrs. Clement's creations—that is, if she's interested in commercial design. Have her call me, please, here at the hotel. About four tomorrow."

"I—I'll see." Nervously Sally turned away as she saw Jim step from an elevator.

"Found it!" Jim took her arm. "Who's your pal?"

"Who knows?" she shrugged as they walked toward Jim's car. "He mistook me for someone else."

She hated to lie, she reflected troubledly; she had promised to attempt no more careers for Aunt Lili. But—what if her aunt's flair for creating beautiful clothes was the means of making her independent of the boarding house she was so incapable of running? What if here was Sally's opportunity for the happiness she and Jim had planned for, dreamed of so long?

Promise or no promise, she was going to look into it. Later she'd tell Jim. If she succeeded in getting Aunt Lili all set in a glamorous job, Jim would have to be pleased.

At her door, Jim's mouth closed on hers in a good night kiss.

"I love you so," she whispered frantically, clinging tightly to him.

"And I love you," he whispered huskily in return. "So much I wish you'd run away with me tonight. Will you, darling?"

She laughed shakily. "Not tonight. But maybe very soon . . ."

SALLY AWOKE next morning feeling absurdly happy. In the saner light of day, it seemed improbable that sweet, flitterbrained Aunt Lili would be hired by Leon Darlier. But it did seem reasonable that she could be taught to run the boarding house properly. It was all in the big book—all she had to do was read up on it, as Sally had.

Clad in gay yellow overalls, the big book under her arm, Sally tripped down the back stairs to the kitchen. There she found her aunt staring in blue-eyed dismay at the faucet from which a steady stream of water cascaded noisily into the sink.

"It won't turn *off*!" Aunt Lili complained.

"Needs a new washer." Sally was delighted at this splendid opportunity for Lesson One. "First we turn off the water in the basement. Come on, I'll show you."

That accomplished, she fumbled through a kitchen drawer where she remembered having stowed a box of washers.

"Funny," she murmured. "Aunt Lili, have you seen a box of little round doo-hickies about so big?"

"Rubber, sort of?" Aunt Lili nodded briskly. "Mm-hmm. I crocheted around 'em and made shade-pulls for Mrs. Ashe's birthday last month."

*"Honestly!"* Sally stared helplessly at her small, girlish aunt, whose soft curling hair, red as Sally's own, covered such a happy vacuum. "Well, I'll run across the street and see if Jim has any."

A car honked at the gas pumps and from within the garage Jim shouted "Be with you in a minute." Poor boy, Sally thought fondly, he works so hard. He needs more help.

Impulsively she spoke to the driver. "Yes, sir?" She'd watched Jim do this so many times that she knew exactly how.

The driver glanced at her casually. "Ethyl. Fill 'er up."

Giggling because the driver probably thought her yellow overalls were a station uniform, Sally opened the tank, reached for the gas hose.

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The hose was snatched roughly from her hands. "I'm not Aunt Lili," Jim grated in an angry undertone. "I'm quite capable of taking care of my business."

Well, the ungrateful thing! Sally thought and stalked huffily into the office to wait.

When the car was gone Jim returned, his blue eyes blazing. He announced, "I hate a meddling woman!"

Sally breathed rapidly. "I was merely trying to help you."

"I want a wife, not a grease-jockey."

"May I have a washer for a faucet, please?" Sally demanded stiffly. "Then I can get back to *my* business."

Jim found a washer. "Here. If you're using it to further the education of Aunt Lili, I'd suggest you forget it and call a plumber."

"We can't afford a plumber." Sally's soft coral lips trembled. "We won't even be able to afford the furnace man this winter."

Jim's voice softened. "Honey, all this waiting is making us quarrel. Let's run off and get married. Now — today! Things'll work out somehow."

"They'll work out if I work 'em out," Sally said hotly. "You're no help. I have to do it all."

"You and your big book!" Jim scowled. "There's some things it takes a man to do. Fixing faucets, for instance, and running furnaces!"

"Oh, pooh!" Sally said loftily and hurried back to the kitchen.

"Watch closely," she bade Aunt Lili. "When I'm married you'll have to do these things yourself, you know."

She'd like nothing better than to run away with Jim, she mused, plying wrench and screwdriver. Still, she couldn't leave Aunt Lili alone. Maybe if this Leon Darlier scheme worked out . . .

"There, wasn't that simple?" she inquired, and turned to find Aunt Lili gazing abstractly out the window.

"Blue dimity, pale blue," she was murmuring dreamily. "For your wedding gown, dear . . . What? Oh, you're finished? Honestly, Sally honey, you're just wonderful!" Her smile was beautiful to see.

Conquering an impulse to conk her pretty aunt with a monkey wrench, Sally put her tools away. Retiring to her room, she fretted away the hours until it was time to call Leon Darlier. She'd talk to him herself, she decided; Aunt Lili lived in a world in which there was nothing more practical than a crochet hook or thimble. Sally would have to handle the whole thing herself, if she didn't want to end her days as the best-dressed and unhappiest old maid in town.

"FOR DINNER," agreed Leon Darlier's deep voice over the telephone. "Excellent. About seven, then."

In high excitement Sally tore downstairs to tell Aunt Lili all about it.

"Leon Darlier, one of the very top designers, saw my autumn leaf dress and liked it. I've asked him to dinner to see more of the dresses you've made. I imagine he wants you to design for him." She put an arm around Aunt Lili's slender waist. "Could you be just awfully sensible tonight and impress him?"

"Of course, Sally. How nice, to have a man to dine!"

"We'll have Mary serve us in the library for privacy. Steak, that's always safe," Sally planned aloud. "Broccoli, cherry cobbler—honey, my things fit you. Wear my black crêpe, with pearls."

"Not something brighter?" her aunt pouted. "I hate black."

Sally chuckled. "You can't go wrong if you give a man steak, black crêpe and pearls. It's fool-proof, darling."

Promptly at seven the doorbell rang. Sally, in a very simply cut, very pale pink jersey frock, with huge phony emeralds for buttons, answered it. Mr. Darlier,

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distinguished in dark overcoat, a Homburg tilted debonairly on his silvery head, paused to gaze discerningly at her.

"Pale pink is extremely interesting with red hair," he announced professionally. "Does things for your skin."

Nodding her thanks, Sally tried not to let him know she was hastening him indoors. Across the street she could see Jim, an astonished look on his tanned face. She'd explain later, she thought guiltily, and shut the door.

"Black with pearls," Mr. Darlier said when he had been introduced to Aunt Lili. "For the very young, Mrs. Clement, or the very old. For you, who are at woman's most fascinating age, something gayer. Something to accent the vivacity I sense in your personality."

Dimpling and blushing rosily, Aunt Lili led Mr. Darlier to the smal llibrary. "Sit here in this comfortable chair, Mr. Darlier."

"Nice, this," Mr. Darlier commented from the big red leather chair, glancing at the white wainscoted walls, the rows of book shelves.

"We think so. Now, for cocktails," Aunt Lili beamed, "I make an excellent Manhattan or Gibson."

"A Gibson, please."

A very serious man, Sally thought, watching his even-featured face in the leaping firelight. She hoped Aunt Lili's graceful fluttering over the drinks wouldn't annoy him. She wondered if she dared take time to run across the street to tell Jim what was going on. He had glowered so forbiddingly when he saw Leon Darlier.

Mr. Darlier tasted his drink and the veriest flicker of a smile warmed the strong, controlled curve of his mouth.

"You are right, Mrs. Clement, an excellent Gibson. Now, I am a man who, having little time, must be all business. I have come to see the dresses you've made for your niece."

"I'll get them," Sally said quickly.

She ran upstairs to her room. Through the window she could see Jim, pacing up and down outside his garage. She flung open the window, whistled softly, beckoned to Jim, who stubbornly refused to budge.

"It's business," she hissed. "For Aunt Lili."

"Now you're picking up men in hotels," Jim said bitterly. "Your promises are worth a lot, aren't they?" He marched, stiff-shouldered, into the garage.

Can't even explain to you, Sally fumed and slammed down the window. Sulk, then, stubborn!

WITH AN ARMFUL of dresses, she returned to the library.

"The russet velvet with the Irish crochet collar—good," Mr. Darlier approved. "The turquoise and citron wool, the cream sharkskin playsuit. You are very knowing, Mrs. Clement, to realize that white is too stark for Miss Evans' delicate coloring."

Aunt Lili smiled, lighted candles on the small table, rang for Mary, the cook, to start serving.

"You have boldness of line, originality, and you aren't afraid of color. Can you use color of other women, not just red-haired women?"

"Always, even before my husband died and I had to go to work, I advised my friends about their clothes, sometimes designed for them. Fashions have always been my hobby."

Mr. Darlier tasted his soup. "Delicious. Your recipe?"

"Canned," Aunt Lilli confessed. "With a dash of sherry. Coconut-marshmallow cake is the only thing I can cook."

Leon Darlier's smile disappeared and Sally's heart sank. He would discover how helpless Aunt Lili was and she, Sally, would have to confess again to an angry Jim that this was another business meet-

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ing which had failed like all the other.

After dinner was over Mr. Darlier said brusquely, "I'm a man who makes quick decisions. Mrs. Clement, my business has grown to the point where I have little time to design; I am too busy with administrative details. I need clever people who can handle line and color. Will you work for me?"

"Of course she will," Sally exclaimed at once, but Mr. Darlier favored her with a stern glance.

"The decision should be your aunt's," he said distantly.

*So I'm a meddler again,* Sally thought miserably. Well, she had done her best. From now on, she was through.

Aunt Lili toyed with her dessert fork. "I'm not a commercial designer, Mr. Darlier," she said slowly. "I can pin materials, nibble at them with scissors, baste and experiment until I get them right for Sally. But to sketch, to cut muslin patterns—no. I don't believe I could."

Sally banged down her coffee cup. "You *can*!" she almost wailed. "Mr. Darlier, she can! If you'll just let me tell you—"

He turned his dark impassive eyes on Sally, then ignored her. "Mrs. Clement, they have a rather nice orchestra at the Peacock Room. We could talk there—alone. Dance a bit, perhaps."

"Dance?" Aunt Lili's eyes sparkled like sapphires. "I haven't danced in ages! But I've nothing to wear."

"My yellow moiré dinner suit," Sally suggested. "Come on, I'll help you dress—"

When a thrilled Aunt Lili had departed, Sally went gloomily to bed. Aunt Lili's girlish frothiness would ruin everything. Mr. Darlier would never hire her now. Well, at least she was getting a date with a handsome man out of it.

It was very late when the sound of a taxi's brakes woke Sally. She pattered to the window in her bare feet.

She could hear a murmur of voices from porch, Aunt Lili's silvery giggle, Mr. Darlier's deep rumble of a voice. And then silence, a long, somehow throbbing silence.

Could Mr. Darlier be—*kissing* Aunt Lili?

Sally was about to don robe and slippers and go downstairs to give Mr. Darlier a piece of her mind, when the front door shut softly and the taxi departed.

Good heavens, Sally thought righteously, wasn't there anything Aunt Lili was clever about? Letting strange men kiss her! She'd speak to her first thing in the morning!

As Sally punched the pillow more comfortably beneath her head, she heard Jim's car pull away with a noisy clash of gears. Working late on the books, she supposed sleepily; when they were married she'd put a stop to that. If they ever managed to get married . . .

IN A RENTED CAR, Leon Darlier arrived next morning for breakfast. Sally found Aunt Lili plying him with Mary's buckwheat cakes and little pig sausages.

"Sally, dear," she blushed prettily, "Mr. Darlier and I are going to get married."

*"Married!"* Sally gasped weakly and fell into her chair.

"Though I should be in New York, I'm lengthening my stay here three days," Mr. Darlier advised crisply. "I hope you'll help Lili with arrangements for our wedding." He smiled briefly. "Don't look at me that way, Sally. I'm thoroughly reliable. You can check with everyone from Dun and Bradstreet, through the Better Business Bureau, up to and including the pastor of my church in New York."

If this is true, Sally thought dazedly, then Jim and I . . .

Her heart burst with a sudden crazy joy. "I think that's marvelous!"

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"Lili's the sweetest thing that ever happened to me." Mr. Darlier gazed in enchantment at the dimpling Aunt Lili. "She's so adorably helpless."

*That she is,* Sally thought wryly, and dashed across the street, where she found Jim Hallett moodily hosing off the sidewalk.

"Aunt Lili! Leon Darlier!" she babbled ecstatically. "I broke my promise, Jim, but everything's going to be perfect. You and I—"

"There is no longer any 'you and I'," Jim said coldly. "I don't care to marry a woman who can't keep a promise."

"I had my fingers crossed," Sally countered, tossing her red curls. "Furthermore, it's all for Aunt Lili."

"Darned decent of you. I suppose kissing that guy last night was for Aunt Lili, too."

Sally's mouth fell open into a red *O*.

"At exactly eight minutes past two this morning," Jim said with savage precision, "I saw you, in your yellow outfit, kissing —whoever he is. Your hotel pick-up!"

Sally counted to ten. "Am I allowed an explanation?" she asked carefully.

"You are not." Jim's mouth was grim. "Now scram, or I'll turn the hose on you."

"You're a fathead." Judiciously Sally narrowed her green eyes. "A great big fat-headed fathead." With dignity she returned home.

"The license bureau?" Aunt Lili was saying. "Sally, do you know—"

"I'll be glad to show you where it is, Leon," Sally told her about-to-be uncle.

Her chin high, she climbed into the rented car. He pulled into Jim's service station.

"Check gas, oil, water and tires," he told Jim, then turned to Sally. "I suppose the license bureau would be at City Hall, wouldn't it?"

With cruel pleasure, Sally saw Jim's head snap back until—she hoped—it hurt.

"Yes. Oh, this is *so* exciting, Leon!"

Jim was rather pale beneath his tan, as they drove away. Served him right, Sally told herself firmly, but her heart ached a bit. It must be awfully hard to see another man driving your girl to the license bureau.

"I'll go in with you," Sally told Leon at City Hall. "I'd like to know where the bureau is myself."

THREE DAYS LATER Sally called Jim, very early, at the small hotel where he lived.

"Aunt Lili is being married at ten," she told him curtly. "You've got to come."

"Aunt Lili?" Jim sounded amazed. "But what about you?"

"Never mind about me. You be here. Aunt Lili'd be hurt if you weren't."

"Okay," he said grudgingly. "But don't expect me to speak to you!"

All the boarders had got the morning off from their jobs to be there. Aunt Lili, in a misty print of soft pastel colors and a confection of a hat, looked beautiful. Leon Darlier was quite wonderful in formal morning clothes. There was a high sugary structure which was a wedding cake, and champagne was cooling in the kitchen. Everything was in a glorious dither.

Jim chose himself a corner of the huge living room and jutted his square jaw at people.

Sally cried a little during the ceremony; weddings were so achingly, beautifully sad. But once Aunt Lili was Mrs. Darlier, all was gaiety and laughing and kissing.

Sally caught Jim in the hall, about to sneak off.

"Oh, no, you don't." She clutched his rigid arm. "As long as the minister's here, I thought—well, we've waited so long . . ."

Jim glared. "For your information, a marriage requires a license."

"Naturally." Smugly, Sally opened her

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purse. "And here it is. I got it the other day."

Jim scanned it dourly, tore it into small pieces and flung them into a potted fern.

"*That* for your license," he growled.

"*Oh!*" Sally felt miserably as if it were her heart he had just torn into tiny pieces and flung away. *He really meant it, then; he doesn't want to marry me!*

While Jim made his departure, Sally stood in the middle of the hall and wept aloud.

Aunt Lili, in her going-away suit, paused briefly to kiss Sally's damp cheek.

"You've cried enough, Sally dear," she suggested. "You and Jim will be marrying soon now. You should be very happy."

"N-no," Sally gulped. "Jim just refused to marry me. I asked him to."

"Tsk tsk! Well, he may get over it. If he doesn't you may have the boarding house. Goodbye, darling, I'll write soon." And in a flurry of rice, Aunt Lili and Leon hurried off on their honeymoon.

The boarding house, Sally mused bitterly; who wants a boarding house; *I want Jim . . .*

TWO WEEKS went by, the unhappiest weeks Sally had ever spent in her life. Any time she cared to, she could see Jim going his busy way across the street at his garage. But never once did he glance up to see her wistful face in the window. It was as if he never had known the red-headed girl who ran the boarding house.

She had too much pride, Sally told herself dismally, to go to him and beg forgiveness. He was stubborn, he was jealous, he refused to listen to her explanations. And she hated him.

Which was, of course, not precisely true. She loved him more than ever, now that she had lost him. She wondered how long it took to die of a broken heart.

Meanwhile there were the usual crises in the boarding house. Sally's big book came in very handy. A bathtub drain refused to drain and Sally boiled it out with lye. Plaster fell from the ceiling in a front bedroom and, precariously balancing herself and the big book at the top of a step ladder, Sally patched it. The ancient gas range in the kitchen developed a leak in one burner; as per the book's directions, Sally sealed the leak with soap until a repairman could come from the gas company.

This was all very well, she told herself gloomily, but she didn't want to be the only girl in the world who knew all about how to keep an old house from falling in on her head. If she was going to keep a house in repair, she wanted it to be her own. *Her own and Jim's!*

One particularly blue Monday, the washing machine refused to run. The plug fitted properly into the wallsocket—it must be the motor itself, Sally thought. She opened the book to the chapter on the care and nuture of electric motors.

It seemed to be written in a foreign language. What, for instance, was an armature? Shucking the motor of its sheath, she examined it. The armature must be this gadget beautifully wrapped in gleaming copper wires. She'd best not unwrap them, she decided; she'd never get them back so neatly.

Sally read further. The brush; maybe that was it. Searching, she found no brush, no brush at all. Probably, she thought sagely, all the bristles had worn off; hence, she could not locate it. Obviously it needed a new one, but what kind, what size? Would it resemble a hairbrush, a toothbrush, a paint-brush . . . ?

"Darn you!" she whispered viciously to the big book, "You don't know much. Not even how to mend a broken heart. You're no good." And with a pleasing thud, she flung the book to the floor, where it lay, face-down.

Determinedly she crossed the street to the service station.

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"Please, Jim," she said in a small voice, "would you come over and see what kind of brush the washing machine motor needs?"

"Certainly." He accompanied her back to the basement, tripping over the book as he entered. "What's that?" he asked crossly.

"It's—just a book," Sally said meekly.

"Hmmm." Jim kicked it aside, strode to the washer, examined the motor's innards. "What makes you thing it's the brush?" he asked at last.

"I couldn't even find it. All the bristles must be worn off—"

"Bristles!" Jim howled with mirth. "My dear dunce, this kind of brush is—never mind, you wouldn't know if I told you. I wonder . . ."

Crossing the basement, Jim flipped a light switch. Nothing happened. At the fuse-box, he replaced a blown fuse and the light came on. He plugged in the washer and it worked. Just like that.

"You're wonderful," Sally sighed. "I—I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Neither do I," he said cheerfully. "In fact, it's been worrying me quite a bit lately. Sally darling, will you marry me now?"

*So that's the way it's done! Even Aunt Lili knew enough to be helpless,* Sally realized in dizzy wonderment.

"Oh, Jim!" she cried and with unmaidenly abandon flung herself into his arms.

His mouth crushed down on hers for a lovely moment that was like—no, not quite like heaven; there was still heaven to come. But it was a delightful sample!

"You scared me to death," she said after a while. "I thought you didn't want to marry me."

"Oh, I wanted to marry *you,* all right. I just didn't want *you* to marry *me,*" he said evenly. "If you know what I mean. There's quite a difference."

"Yes," she agreed softly. "I guess there is."

"We'll keep the book; there are a few things I may not know about running a house." Jim's blue eyes glinted with happiness. "And of course I'll run it. The man should always be the boss."

"Oh, always, darling," Sally whispered tenderly—and crossed her fingers.

## *First Date*

by Catherine E. Berry

*You came to tea this afternoon,*
*And you will never know*
*The hours I spent to set the stage,*
*To give this shining glow*
*To this small place that I call home,*
*But I am quite content,*
*Because I saw your lingering glance*
*Before, at last, you went*
*Reluctantly into the night—*
*Rainswept and Winter-black,*
*Your eyes, my dear, said more than words,*
*I know you'll soon be back!*

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# Lady in Waiting

By

VAL NEWELL

***Kelly made an investment in love, and a Texas millionaire bought up her share.***



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## CHAPTER ONE

### Lady of Mystery

SHE HAD THE sort of red hair that didn't look well against a mustard-brown sweater. And the shade of green eyes that deserved something better than red plastic rimmed glasses in an accentuated design that did not suit her face.



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Her name wasn't really Ann Kelly, though her boss thought it was. Maybe sometime she would tell him. He was sort of a cute boss, with thick yellow hair and wide shoulders.

She could have fallen in love with him, maybe, if it weren't for Benjy. But she had to go on waiting for Benjy.

She had waited a long time already—too long, Kelly thought dismally. Sometimes it frightened her a little. When it did, she had to think of it as an investment. If she could wait just a little longer, maybe it would pay off.

Maybe? Of course it would! Benjy loved her, didn't he? That was why she had gotten into this mess and had to change her name and everything.

It was quarter to five. Her boss did not like clock watchers, but Kelly was frankly watching the clock. Outside the windows it was a beautiful crisp spring afternoon—and she hated it! It made her think about romance and fun and Benjy. So she watched the clock instead, her green eyes pensive behind the ridiculous glasses, and her kissable mouth sulky under the wrong shade of lipstick.

Her boss came out of his office. His name was Tony Judson, one of the Sea Cliff Judsons, and his family was wealthy enough to finance this fling into public relations Tony had decided to take. So far, there wasn't much business.

"Miss Kelly, I'm in a jam," he began. "I wonder if you'd—"

HE STOPPED TO EYE her for a long moment. Then he said moodily, "No, I don't suppose you would."

"Would what?"

He ran his fingers through his hair, not wanting to say it. Maybe he had changed his mind. It had something to do with her appearance, obviously.

He didn't know she wasn't Ann Kelly at all. She was Kelly Brooke, and all she had to do was take off her glasses and say the name, and he'd start making a pass at her.

She didn't take off the glasses. She only watched him with the stony stupidity she had tried to adopt and said patiently, "What is it, Mr. Judson?"

"There's a guy from Texas—Cole Maitland. He dropped into town unexpectedly. My sister usually helps me out on things like this, but she's out of town for the weekend, and it seems that every girl Alicia or I can think of is already dated."

Alicia was his fiancée. She was blonde like Tony, but much haughtier. She considered Ann Kelly simply impossible, and often hinted that Tony ought to be able to find someone better than that.

Kelly had overheard Tony tell her once that this was a brand new venture and most office girls wanted a reliable company that would not fold their checks and steal away.

"Yes, Mr. Judson?" If he thought, Kelly told herself coldly, he was going to hook her into any blind date with a bragging Texan, he could think again.

"He's a good egg," Tony said hurriedly. "The best. He has a ranch there—a million acres of shorthorns, or something—and the cattle started dying off from contaminated water. Contaminated with oil, that is. He's just bought out a small company here that looks like a good investment. I was hoping to nail the public relations on it."

"Oh," said Kelly, and looked at him for further enlightenment.

Not that she needed it. Tony was way down at the bottom of a well of despair. Or he never would be asking this of her. Not of Ann Kelly.

Alicia, Kelly thought absently, would die if Kelly appeared in a baggy old gown and some bright orange "evening" lipstick. It might even be fun.

"Could you," Tony began hopelessly, "I mean—"

Kelly brightened. "You mean you want

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me to be a blind date for this Texan?"

"Maitland." Tony was sunk and knew it. "Cole Maitland."

"Gee," said Kelly, and fished into the bottom drawer for her plum-colored lipstick.

ON THE WAY home, she regretted the whole thing. She didn't have a baggy evening gown because as Ann Kelly she hadn't had one single date. She didn't want one. She was waiting for Benjy.

Benjy was no tall, handsome hero but she loved him. She was completely mad about him. "Mad" was exactly the word, her parents back home had written her. Mama said she had ruined her life for that crook, and Father wrote that if he ever heard of that dirty little pipsqueak hanging around Kelly again, he was personally going to come to town with his shotgun and blast his head off. Father talked wildly sometimes.

Still, there were times when Kelly awakened in the middle of the night with tears on her cheeks and wondered if she had done the wrong thing. Loving Benjy had cost her her job and her reputation and six months in jail for contempt of court because she had absolutely refused to testify against him.

They had tried to prove that he had killed a girl. It was ridiculous because Benjy just wasn't that sort. He was kind and gentle and wonderful. His misery over the whole thing had torn at her heart.

"How did I ever get into a mess like this?" he had asked her bitterly after they arrested him. "If you talk, baby, I'm cooked."

"I won't talk. Oh, Benjy, I won't say anything—"

"They'll slam you in the tank."

"I don't care. They'd put you back in jail, too, wouldn't they?"

"But good," he had agreed unhappily.

So she hadn't told them anything about that last date she'd had with Benjy. She hadn't told about dancing on the stars all night, or about how Joe's Hamburger Inn at four in the morning seemed like heaven.

She hadn't told them that Benjy had come into her apartment for a good-night kiss.

It had been a wonderful kiss, and she had known as well as if he were telling her in words that Benjy was going to ask her to marry him.

The words were quivering right there in the room when a nasty voice drawled: "Attaboy, Benjy—that's the good old technique!"

The way Benjy had stiffened had made her realize that he recognized that girl's voice even before he turned.

Her name was Madeleine, though Kelly hadn't known it then. She wasn't quite sober and she was pretty careless about the things she said and the way she said them. But she said a lot.

She said that if Benjy was thinking about marrying anybody, he had better marry her first, or he was going to wake up some cold night and find himself in a hot place permanently.

She said that Benjy was her boy friend, had been her boy friend for a long time, and if any red-headed little bad word thought she was going to get him away from her, Madeleine meant to do something about it.

She was pretty awful. And she wouldn't stop talking. In the end, Benjy had slapped her and Madeleine had gone into sobbing hysterics that roused the neighbors. Benjy had barely managed to get her out of there before people came pounding on the door.

Kelly had told the neighbors she'd had the radio on too loud, and then had gone to bed to lie there scared and worried. Not that she had really believed any of the things the girl had said. She still believed in Benjy.

But even though none of it was true,

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she had wondered how Benjy had ever become acquainted with a girl like that.

The next day someone found Madeleine dead. And a week later, Benjy was in jail.

"You believe in me, don't you, baby?"

"Benjy, you know I do!"

"I've got to get out of here. I want to marry you."

So he got out, finally, because nobody but Kelly could prove that he had seen the girl in months. And Kelly refused to talk, no matter what the neighbors said about hearing a man's voice that sounded like Benjy, and a woman's sobs that could have been Madeleine.

When they let Kelly out of jail, Benjy had left town. He had written her a lot at first. He was in Chicago, shaking the dust of the whole thing out of his clothes. Later, when he wasn't writing so often, there had been a note or two from New York.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Wait for My Love

SHE HAD BEEN out of jail six weeks, now. She had written Benjy at the New York address the moment she was free. She had thought he would catch the first plane to see her, but he hadn't.

He hadn't even answered her letters. When she looked up a friend of Benjy's she had once met, he had said vaguely that the last he heard, Benjy had picked up a lot of coin at Hialeah.

He would come, though. Over and over she told herself that Benjy would come the first moment he could get away.

Benjy was in love with her. He wouldn't get her into a jam like this and then walk out. Would he?

She let herself into her apartment and put her coat away. It wasn't the same apartment she used to have. This one was just one room, with a bed that folded into the wall and a bath she shared with another family. It wasn't very nice.

She hadn't done anything to it in the six weeks she had been here because Tony didn't pay her very much, and she kept thinking Benjy would take her away anyway.

She ate a cold lamb chop that was in the refrigerator and looked over her clothes. This was her first date in months. It could be a lot of fun, if only she dared let it.

But the moment she appeared as herself, Tony would recognize her and fire her in nothing flat. He might put up with a droop like Ann Kelly, but no man in his right mind would have Kelly Brooke in his office. Not, at least, the sort of man Kelly would care to work for.

The phone started ringing. With a sigh Kelly answered it, knowing it was Tony. He would have found another girl—any other girl—so there was no need after all for Miss Kelly to inconvenience herself, though she had been very kind to offer.

"Hello, baby," Benjy said.

Kelly stood there dazedly, hearing the voice but not believing it was Benjy. Funny, she wondered, how for a moment there Tony Judson had sounded like Benjy.

"Hello," she responded faintly.

"It's Benjy. Remember? What are you doing tonight?"

"Benjy," she whispered.

"Sure. I'll be over as soon as I can get away. Around eight?"

"All right, eight," said Kelly's voice all by itself. Her mind did not seem to be functioning at all.

And then she put the phone down. That was a silly thing to do—maybe Benjy wanted to say something else. She picked it up again, but the line was dead.

Benjy. He was here. Right here in town. He would pick her up around eight, and they would do the town, the way they

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used to. Kelly and Benjy together again!

She couldn't seem to believe it, no matter how she tried.

Kelly stood there. After a while her hand went up and removed the silly glasses. She ran her fingers through her hair slowly, feeling it. The fingers slipped down to that awful, baggy, mustard-colored sweater.

Abruptly she whirled and ran to the closet. There was a blue evening gown Benjy had always liked. A yellow one, too, but he'd seen that too often. There must be something else here somewhere. Oh, yes, the gold satin, but it was the oldest one she had.

There had been a dream of a short formal in the window downtown yesterday.

She was at the phone, rifling through the book, dialing.

"Maison Madamoiselle? You've a short formal in the window with ostrich plumes that—oh, you can't be closed! You just can't! It's only five minutes past closing time, and I simply have to have a new gown for Benjy!"

She remembered Tony's fiancée, and put just the right touch of haughtiness in it. And it worked. They said they would wait for her.

It was a dream gown, creamy beige chiffon with an uneven hemline and a six-inch-deep fluff of beige plumes outlining the strapless bodice. She looked like Kelly Brooke. She looked gay and enchanting and awfully *femme fatale*.

BENJY WHISTLED when he saw it. "Baby!" he breathed. "What have I been missing?"

She spun to show off, and the skirt frothed like a ballerina's. Benjy caught her in his arms and kissed her. Heaven, she thought dreamily. Golden stairways and pink moonlight and Benjy . . .

It was several moments before she realized Benjy wasn't kissing her like pink moonlight at all. He was being far too expert—the way he always was, only now it seemed different. It seemed . . . cheap!

"Benjy—"

"What made me think I could live without you?" he asked huskily, and kissed her again.

So he had thought he could live without her! He had, after all, walked out on her.

She was cold all over, an icy cold that settled numby in her heart. When he let her go, she said, a scant quarter-inch from his waiting lips:

"Where have you been?"

"Florida, Kentucky, here and there. Who cares?" He kissed her again.

Hialeah, he meant. And Churchill Downs. And—yes, of course, what had brought him back here was Golden Gate Fields.

She had been awfully uncritical of Benjy in those other days. She had never even thought to ask him how he made his money. You'd think any girl, no matter how bemused, would ask that much, wouldn't you?

As a witness, she hadn't been permitted to attend the trial. So she hadn't heard about him there, either. And the papers had been so dreadful, she hadn't believed a word of them.

He was here for the meet, and when it was over, Benjy would be gone again.

She got out of his arms. Her eyes were cool and green and not sentimental any more. She looked at Benjy and saw what he was. A little guy who talked big and lived shady. A man who knew how to evade questions by a frontal attack on a girl's emotions.

Kelly turned away from his tender eyes and soft mouth that was waiting to kiss her again.

Her words were husky. "It's been a long time, Benjy."

"Sure."

"I was lonely."

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"Yeah, baby, I know. So was I. Look, we—"

She said softly, "I don't like being walked out on, Benjy."

"Sweet, I didn't walk out on you. I was coming back the minute you were released, but I had bad luck and ran out of dough at the wrong time."

"You? Out of money?" She laughed a little. "Is that what you told Madeleine when you brushed her off?"

His face changed.

"Listen, you didn't fall for the story that lush gave you, did you?"

"No. Not then."

"Kelly, honey—"

"Get out," she said softly.

"Now, wait—" He was moving toward her.

Kelly said through her teeth, so savagely it stopped him dead, "Get out!"

She didn't believe he would actually go. If he was innocent . . . if there really hadn't been anything between him and Madeleine . . . any man would just laugh and take her in his arms . . .

BENJY LEFT. She saw the door close after him and knew what it meant, but she was too sick to believe it.

Benjy wouldn't go like that. He loved her. She wasn't just—another Madeleine to him . . .

She stood there for a long time, not thinking. Not feeling anything.

After endless moments, she realized that someone was rapping on her door. It had been going on for quite a while.

She moved to open it.

"Good evening," Tony said. "I kept telling myself you must be here, because that chap who just left—" He stopped, looking at her.

Kelly, in the new beige gown, with her red curls brushed until they glittered, looked back and hadn't the faintest idea why he had stopped.

"Come in," she said.

He obeyed, staring at her as if he had been put into a trance.

"I wish I had a drink to offer you, but I haven't," Kelly said. "Not on the Judson salary."

"That's all right, Alicia has them. Cole's waiting for us there."

She remembered, then. The blind date. Good heavens, she had forgotten about it from the moment she heard Benjy's voice on the phone!

She looked down curiously at the gown. She couldn't see much of it, because of the row of fluffy plumes. They stirred under her breath. They looked soft and awfully French. Wicked, even.

Her gaze lifted slowly. There was something coming across Tony Judson's face—wisdom and shock and contempt, and a trace of something else she did not want to name.

"You're Kelly Brooke," he stated flatly.

"Yes."

His blue eyes slid over the gown again, seeing the soft curves.

"You have me in a spot," he said slowly. "I told them you were Ann Kelly. Cole's waiting. I can't let him down—"

Her chin was high and icy. "I'm fired, is that what you're trying to say?"

There was a pause. Then he grinned in embarrassment.

"No. I'm saving that for later. Alicia will raise the devil, but not in front of Cole. I'll help you get another job, Kelly. A good one. Be a good kid and help me out tonight."

"Sure," she agreed bitterly. "That's my big trouble. I'm always a good kid, and it never pays out."

He picked up her wrap. As he draped it carefully across her shoulders so as not to crush the plumes, his hands lingered a little.

"Kelly, maybe we—"

Her eyes, furiously green, met his at close range, stopping him.

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"Forget it," she said.

He had a cab waiting. Kelly sat in one corner of it. Tony sat in the other, smoking moodily.

"You're damned touchy," he said.

"All right. I'm touchy."

"I told you I'd get you another job."

"And maybe a better apartment and another evening gown? With a platina mink cape thrown in?" She laughed shortly, and he said nothing more.

He knew that if he did, she would walk out on him and there would be no hope of getting that Maitland contract.

So he waited . . .

## CHAPTER THREE

### In the Heart of a Texan

KELLY'S EYES WERE glittering greenly when she walked into Alicia Clive's apartment. She knew even before she met Cole Maitland what the routine was going to be. Benjy and Tony had already shown her. If there was ever a time in her life when she hated men *en masse*, it was right now.

But Cole Maitland wasn't anything like what she had expected. He was long and lanky and homely, brown as a mestizo, and had tiny humorous sun-squints around his eyes. His mouth was too generously proportioned. But then, he had those scraggly eyebrows to balance it.

Across Alicia's living room, he stared at her as if she were a mirage that had suddenly appeared on a stretch of desert back home.

Alicia was staring at her, too. And not liking it at all.

Introducing her as Ann Kelly, Tony kept up the innocent front, though nobody believed it any more. Except maybe this man from Texas, who had no way of knowing any better.

"Just call me Kelly. Everybody does," she told them, ignoring Alicia's outraged glare as Tony took her wrap. Her forefinger made a careless gesture of acknowledgement. "Howdy, Tex."

"Howdy," said Cole Maitland.

Alicia murmured sweetly, "What an adorable gown, Miss Kelly! Isn't it the one I saw in Maison Madamoiselle's window yesterday?"

"It could even have been today," she shrugged, accepting the cocktail Tony brought her. "Sixty-five dollars, and the collection agency will probably take it back next month. Are you interested in buying a slightly second-hand gown, Alicia?"

Cole said, "I always wanted to see a redhead wear that color, but I never thought of feathers."

"It's fantastic," Alicia said flatly.

"Enchanting, the salesgirl told me." Kelly's green gaze moved insolently to the man across the room. "Are you enchanted, Tex?"

"Very."

"I'll enchant you further."

She handed her cocktail back to Tony, who had been about to join Alicia, and walked over to Cole. Turning her back to him, she stood close.

"Take hold of them," she ordered.

"What?"

"The plumes. Grab a handful, right near the middle of the back."

He hesitated, then gingerly took hold of them where they dipped down to a tapered joining in back.

Before he could realize what she meant to do, she spun away from him, and the entire strip of fluff came off in his hands.

Kelly stood there laughing at his startled expression.

"With or without," she told him. "As you prefer." She made a graceful curtsy. "You choose, pardner."

Dark, angry, his gaze raked over her. Even without the trimming, the beige chiffon gown was striking, and so enchantingly filled with the red-headed girl

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who was taunting him so unmercifully.

"Of course," she murmured, "if you say 'with,' you'll have to put that thing back on, snap by snap, all the way around."

She turned down the merest edge of hem to show the tiny hidden fasteners. "See?"

His eyes smouldered, but his mouth smiled. It was wide and furious and strangely fascinating.

"I'll take you on that," he said softly, his eyes intent on her face.

Her heart made a cold plop into the middle of her stomach. She hadn't thought he would dare—he seemed the backward, conservative, untalkative kind who wasn't too easy around girls . . .

The snaps were very small. They were spaced three quarters of an inch apart all around the gown. He was awkward at first, but by the time he had finished the back he was snapping them along quite expertly. Kelly had meant to do the rest herself, but when she turned, those dark eyes were daring her to back down.

Kelly smiled and lifted her chin defiantly, but she was seething.

"You've never been in Texas, have you?" he murmured.

"I'd hate Texas," she said, catching the words just in time to prevent snapping them.

"Why?"

"What's it got besides The Alamo?"

"Me," he responded gently.

And that was something, all right, she conceded in bitter defeat. Given half a chance, this big lanky millionaire could make as beautiful a pass as Benjy could. Or Tony Judson. Or any other man who looked into Kelly's stormy green eyes and thought, "Well, well! Here's a redhead!"

She hated them. All of them. Big or little or young or old. They twisted hearts around and took everything they could get without leaving a girl even her pride for consolation.

They did the town in style that evening. Tony, determined to make an impression on Cole Maitland, took them everywhere that was worth the cover charge.

Kelly saw again a lot of the places where Benjy had taken her—the places she had been dreaming so sentimentally about for so many months. Only now they didn't mean a thing. They were just places to go.

Tony was awfully devoted to Alicia. He was tender and charming with her, and put out at Kelly.

"What are you trying to do?" he asked her once, when Alicia was away dancing with the Texas man.

"Nothing."

"Then stop treating me the way you do!"

She rested her chin in her palm, surveying him through her lashes.

"How do I treat you, darling?"

"Like that," he said through his teeth. "Insolently, as if you'd seen all you wanted and were through with me. It gives Alicia the wrong ideas."

"A fig for Alicia," she murmured carelessly. "Wait until she learns about that wonderful job you're going to find for me!"

He flushed hotly, but stuck to it.

"And lay off Cole, too. After all, I don't want to antagonize the guy."

"Am I antagonizing him?"

"He'd like to brain you, and you know it! That business about those silly feathers—And quit calling him 'Tex' and 'pardner' and ribbing him all the time. Do you want to get me in a jam?"

Kelly stared at his mouth deliberately. It was a spoiled, sulky mouth.

She said tenderly, "Darling, you're cute."

Alicia and Cole came back just in time to hear it. Kelly picked up her cocktail and let her eyes jeer amusedly at Cole about it.

"You know what I think?" he asked,

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three night clubs and two hours later. They were dancing to the best orchestra Kelly had heard all evening . . . or maybe it was because Cole was a much better dancer than she had expected.

"What you think," Kelly murmured, clinging to him, "is fascinating, I'm sure."

Her head was on his shoulder, a million soft red curls that stirred under his breath. Her eyes were closed—long, silken dark lashes against pale velvet cheeks.

"I think," Cole said carefully, "you are beautiful and vicious."

Kelly straightened. Her soft mouth went tense and angry. And then she laughed.

"Not really?"

"So you're mad at the world. But do you have to wreck the party?"

"Why not?"

"Tony must have been out of his mind to bring you and Alicia together."

"Me and Alicia?" she repeated. "You mean, Tony's love light and his fiancée? How intriguing!"

"You're headed straight into trouble," he warned. "You can't do this, Kelly."

Her smile was mocking. "Cain't I, pardner?"

He stared down at her for long moments. She saw all expression fade out of his eyes, and wondered about it. She saw his full, generous mouth go straighter, and lifted her brows a little.

His head lifted suddenly, almost a gesture, as he glanced back at Tony. She didn't get it until, at the edge of the floor, they stopped dancing. She found herself being taken out of the room.

"Cole!" she protested. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Giving Tony a chance to square things with Alicia."

"Listen, if you think you can start shoving me around . . ."

The checkroom girl was already handing him Kelly's wrap. He drew it over her shoulders with firmness.

"You have a choice of being shoved, carried, or operating under your own power. Name your poison, sweetheart," he muttered.

"Cole Maitland," she began furiously, and then stopped in panic. One second before he would have swept her off her feet and carried her through the door.

She walked out, icily. There was a cab, and Cole told him to drive somewhere far away. When the cabby asked whether he meant in town or out, Cole said out. The driver mentioned a town he said was thirty miles out, and Cole said that would be fine.

KELLY SAT rigidly in a far corner. "Thirty miles out," she choked. "If that doesn't sound exactly like an oil hick from Texas!"

"A few more remarks out of you, and—"

"And what?" she asked, so angry she didn't care what happened. "You're supposed to be a gentleman of the Old Southwest. A Texas Ranger, ma'am—the succor of womanhood. Or are you?"

"Sucker, is right." He snapped open a cigarette case and handed it to her. "You've been making a fool of me since you first set eyes on me."

She took one, tapping it angrily against the case. "How could I?"

"Oh, sure! Since Eve rooked Adam, dopes like me have been taking murder off green-eyed little devils."

He took the case back, almost jerking it from her hand, and found a lighter.

In the flickering yellow glow, his mouth was tensely furious. Kelly's eyes glittered slightly.

"Now's as good a time as any," she said.

"For what?"

"That apartment in San Antonio—or is it Dallas, or maybe Amarillo?" Her mouth twisted slightly. "You're working up to it, aren't you?"

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He stared at her, forgetting to use the lighter flame. An instant vanished, then another . . . and another.

"Why, you little—" he began softly, and stopped.

In the fleeting seconds that followed, she saw his eyes. Dark, wondering, unbelieving. And then something else crawled into them—something alive and impassioned, hating her a little, and wanting to punish her for causing that hatred.

Then the lighter snapped off, and the back of the cab seemed much darker than it should have been. Dark, and a little bit frightening.

He caught her shoulders and with one smooth movement drew her close. She found herself lying across his lap, held too close to struggle, her face the merest breath below his.

That was good, she thought, stunned. More than good. Expert. Years af smooth practice lay behind that revealing gesture.

She whispered, almost against his lips, "So you've been around, my gauche Texan."

"Haven't you?"

"Maybe."

"We'll find out for sure," he whispered, his mouth covering hers.

Something rocked through her, wild and dangerous. She lay still as death, hardly breathing. Waiting . . . while against his shoulders her fingers curled into tense little fists.

"You have," he said huskily. "Are there any answers you don't know?"

"Yes."

"Such as?"

"How long it takes a Texan to realize he's licked."

"Remember The Alamo," he breathed, and kissed her again.

A queer, delicious terror spread through her that was half panic lest she respond, and half longing to do it. She couldn't be a wooden woman forever. Now, right now, she had to break this up . . .

The kiss trailed up her cheek, sending skyrockets through her, and stopped at her lashes.

"My dad always warned me California didn't have a thing bigger or better than Texas."

Kelly's finger unclenched slowly, to curve around his shoulders. She mustn't —And then suddenly caution flung itself out the window, and her hands tightened suggestively.

"No?" she whispered.

It lasted a long time, that one. Too long. It was fire and passion and sweetness and insanity. It held all the traitorous longings of girls who fell in love and were hurt and met men like Cole and fell in love again . . .

No, that was silly. She wasn't going to fall in love again—never again, as long as she lived.

Her eyes opened languorously. There were lights. Sodium vapor lights. They were going across a bridge. And lying in his arms like this, she could see the suspension cable swoop down from a dark tower as the cab moved along, and curve back up again.

"California won that round," Cole said tautly.

"I thought Texas did."

"Let's call it a draw."

"Let's."

SHE WAS IN her corner. He was in his. And they were saying silly things like this to hide the perfectly obvious fact that he was badly shaken and that Kelly would have stayed in his arms a lot longer with no persuasion at all.

They found their cigarettes and lighted them without looking at each other. Then Kelly started talking—something about that bridge back there and how it happened to be built after everybody said it never could.

Soon they passed a place on the road that looked interesting, so Cole made the

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driver turn right around and go back to it.

They had coffee and sandwiches at a little red checked table, while others danced to wired music in the softly lighted room. Cole did not meet her eyes and she didn't try to meet his, either. They watched the dancers instead.

Kelly tried, once. "Look, Tex—"

"Skip it."

"About Tony—"

"I said skip it!" It was almost savage.

He didn't want to hear about Tony. Right now he almost hated Tony.

If she could just explain to him...and maybe explain about Benjy, too—tell him about being Kelly Brooke and how she came to be that way . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Mended Heart

WHEN THEY LEFT the place, they found that the cab was empty. The driver must have gone to the truckers' café across the road. They stood under a big tree near the cab, watching the late cars go by.

Cole said in soft fury, "You'd think we've never kissed anybody before!"

"Maybe we haven't," Kelly whispered. "Maybe we just thought we did."

He looked down at her for a long moment in the dimness under the tree. "Why doesn't anyone call you Ann?"

"Ask Tony. Tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing." She was crying softly, terribly, not wanting him to know.

"Kelly, what's wrong with us?"

"Let me go."

"It's Tony, damn him—marrying that little snob—"

"Stop it, Cole."

"I'll break his back."

She sobbed, "Let me go!"

But he didn't. He tipped her face up and kissed her again.

She had been a fool. She had fallen for Benjy, and hadn't been very smart about it. And then when she added Madeleine on top of that . . . poor, lost Madeleine whom Kelly hadn't felt the least sorry for at the time, or even believed . . .

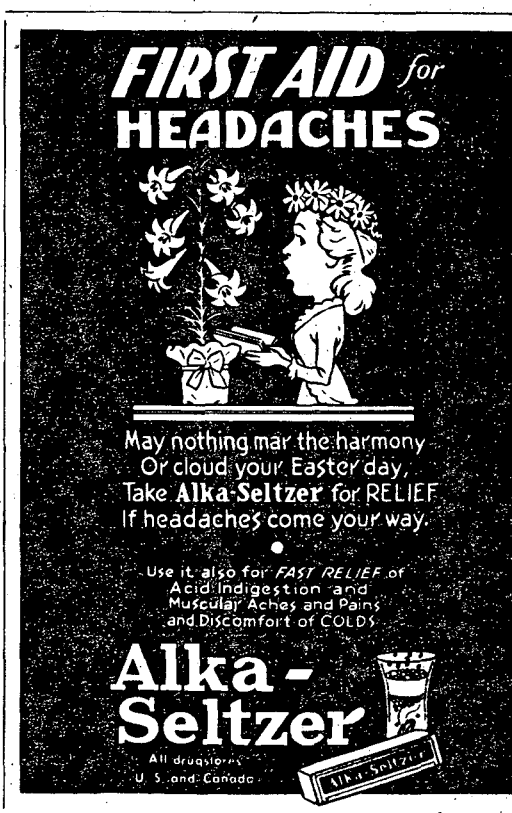
He would despise her.

But at least he would realize the shocked bewilderment she'd felt when the judge had sternly told her she was in contempt of court and sentenced her to six months in the county jail. She had thought it would be only forty-eight hours—or maybe at the most ten days.

Cole could sympathize that much, she was sure. At least he wouldn't call her a jail bird.

*My jail bird girl friend, out in California,* she thought bitterly. *Oh, Cole, go away—go away from me forever . . .*

He took her home, but it was a long way home. He said at her door, "I'm going to see you again."


FIRST AID for HEADACHES
May nothing mar the harmony
Or cloud your Easter day,
Take Alka-Seltzer for RELIEF
If headaches come your way.
Use it also for FAST RELIEF of
Acid Indigestion and
Muscular Aches and Pains
and Discomfort of COLDS
Alka-Seltzer
All druggists U. S. and Canada

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She smiled faintly. "Are you, pardner?"

"Don't start that again," he warned.

All by themselves, her arms slipped around his neck. One last time, she thought dimly. Just once more—it wouldn't make any difference to him now, but it meant good-bye for Kelly.

She whispered, "I like you, Tex."

"Sure," he agreed tenderly.

"Forgive me for being such a brat?"

His dark eyes were whimsical. "For being Kelly, you mean?"

She nodded.

His mouth was poignantly close. "I was always good at roping wild fillies."

"Roped and tied," she whispered, lifting her lips in blind despair.

And that was the way she felt under the heady ecstasy of his kiss. Roped and tied. And watching him walk away . . .

TONY was late coming to work next morning, so she wrote out a check herself, and laid it carefully in the center of his desk for a signature. She cleaned out her desk and then, having spare time, did some figures on a sheet of paper.

Ten dollars would pay bus fare a long way. She could stay at a YWCA somewhere—or better yet, she would pick some small town where nobody would ever expect her to go.

She would be Kelly Brooke, but if she was lucky, no one would know or care who Kelly Brooke was.

Her heart turned over and stuck there. Her eyes closed in a sick misery, while her pencil went on making silly little hearts and arrows on the sheet of paper. A door closed.

Kelly murmured, "All right, so I'm fired, and let's not make a long scene out of it. My check is on your desk and—"

She stopped abruptly.

Cole seated himself on one corner of her desk interestedly. "Go on."

He was lanky and rugged and brown. He had a wide tender mouth and whimsical eyes—and she could feel her heart cracking wide open.

Kelly rose and walked over to the window without speaking to him at all. She stood there, looking down at a shiny new trackless trolley that was pulling out from a curb.

Cole said behind her, "Do we say good morning, or is it only five minutes later so we don't need preludes like that?"

He turned her into his arms.

She was rigid. "What are you doing here?"

"Seeing if I dreamed you."

Her voice thickened. "Look, Tex. Fun is fun, but let's not carry it too far."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning you're in a strange country, pardner, and there are a couple of other boys around."

She saw the color fading under his tan, and stopped watching it.

"Listen, Kelley, if you're going into that act again, so help me, I'll wring your neck!"

For a split instant she thought he meant to do it. One hand slipped up to her neck. Then it tangled in her short, soft red curls and he tipped her head back so she had to meet his gaze.

"You know I'm in love with you, don't you, Kelly?"

"Love," she said, "is a very short word covering a lot of involved situations. Believe me, Tex. I know."

"Shut up," Cole told her.

And bending his head, he kissed her with a fury that sent her heart rocking.

SHE WAS CRYING, clinging to him when Tony walked in. Either Cole did not hear him or he didn't want to hear him, for he didn't let her go, or even stop this crazy kiss.

And that did it. Kelly realized it the moment she heard Tony's voice. A sulky, spoiled voice, filled with pique and jealousy:

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"Nice work, Cole. I didn't realize she had you going, too!"

Cole lifted his head slowly. Too slowly. His gaze looked far, far, deep into Kelly's and saw all the wrong things.

He spoke very softly. "Be careful, Tony."

"Careful?" Tony jeered, forgetting everything save that Kelly had once laughed in his face. "You'd better start remembering a few of those oil millions you have running around, sucker! Kelly is."

Cole did not move. "Are you, Kelly?"

She did not answer.

"She won't answer incriminating questions," Tony said. "She never does. I didn't know that when I hired her. I didn't know until she came out of her disguise last night. She's not Ann Kelly at all. She's Kelly Brooke."

"I know," Cole said.

"You know?" Tony cried incredulously. "You know she's nothing but a redheaded little jailbird with a racetrack boy friend who—"

Releasing her, Cole walked over and hit him hard, with a furious but methodical precision that sent Tony sprawling against the water cooler to carry it down with a crash. Picking him up, Cole shoved him into the hall, and locked the door.

Kelly stood there with her mouth open.

"Cole—of all the high-handed, outrageous— He'll call the police!"

"He has a key, if he wants to use it." Cole walked over to her. He stood there looking at her. "Now talk, Kelly. Talk fast, and maybe it will sound good enough."

"I—Cole—"

"When did you see him last? That fellow—Benjy."

"Last night."

"What happened?"

"Cole, you can't change anything. Just go away."

His hands went into his pockets, carefully. There was a deadly softness in his words. "What happened, Kelly?"

"I learned what a fool I was."

"Did he kill her?"

"I don't know. I don't want to know. All they ever had against him was circumstantial evidence, that's why I wouldn't testify."

He said in low fury, "So you found out he made a fool of you. And there's an old saw about the woman scorned taking it out on the next guy. Me, Kelly."

She sobbed, "I told you to go away and let me alone, didn't I? I didn't ask you to—to fall in love with me—"

"Are you talking about love?"

She was crying. "Let me alone, Cole!"

His hands caught her shoulders and he shook her. "Are we?" he asked furiously.

"All right, I love you! Is that what you want me to say? That only my pride was hurt, that if I'd been the least bit in love with Benjy I couldn't have done the things I did last night? That it only took me a couple hours to fall in love with a Texas cyclone who—"

"Kelly," he said, and swept her close, so that the rest of it was stifled against his shoulder.

He tipped her chin up gently. "About that apartment in San Antonio you mentioned—or was it Amarillo? That's out. I've a spread that includes a few other things than oil derricks. From the ranch house, you can't even see the wells."

Kelly murmured shakenly, "Darling, are you proposing to me?"

Dark and soft and in love with her, his eyes answered her. A tender wanting curve lay around his mouth.

Her arms slipped around his neck. "If you're silly enough to do a thing like that," she whispered, "you've got yourself a bride, pardner."

But this time Cole didn't even notice the word.

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By BUDDY BASCH

UP UNTIL this month this column has used people who are top established names. This month we've decided to use a pretty young lady who's on her way to the top. She's young, fresh and wholesome, and we think you'd like to hear all about her from the beginning.

Patti Page, who started life as Clara Ann Fowler, was born in Claremont, Oklahoma, on November 8, 1927. Claremont is a small town near Tulsa. When she was very little, Patti's parents moved to Tulsa, so most of her education was received in the grammar schools and high school of that Southwestern metropolis. Patti was one of eleven children and her parents were farming people.

Patti's favorite subjects in high school were painting and dramatics and she appeared in several amateur performances. One day she got a call from the manager of the local radio station. He wanted to interview her for a job. Patti was hired, not as a singer, but as the staff artist for the station! She sat around the office, drawing charts, making posters and helping out with the ads until one day when their regular singer quit. The manager needed someone in a hurry, and Patti asked if she might try out for the spot.

While singing on that afternoon show, Patti was heard by Jack Rael, who was appearing with the Jimmy Joy band. Jack and some of the boys decided here was a real voice—one with appeal and real sincerity.

Jack called the station and made an appointment to talk to Patti, who was still Clara Ann Fowler.

Jack was convinced that the young lady could become one of the big names in the music business. He wanted her to sign a contract right then so he could begin to mold her career with engagements all over the country. He tried to convince her parents, but they weren't going to let their little girl go running all around the country with a fellow they'd never seen before. It took almost a year before Jack convinced them. Then he got Patti a job with a band. After a few weeks she showed more poise, self-confidence and improvement than could have been hoped for or

★ **PATTI PAGE, MERCURY RECORD STAR.**



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expected even after years of training.

Rael had become Patti's associate by this time. He renamed her Patti Page and set about to push her to the top. Incidentally, Patti looks a lot more like Patti Page than she does Clara Ann Fowler! Sound odd? What we mean is that her stage name sounds like the cute, refreshing and unspoiled girl she is.

Then came engagements designed to further the interest of the American public in *That Singing Rage, Miss Patti Page.* That was the title Jack had thought up for her. The first thing she did was to sing on *The Breakfast Club* over the ABC network six mornings a week from Chicago. Then she got her own CBS show. Patti was featured twice on the cover of *Down Beat.*

Next came another break. Mercury Records was looking around for a girl singer who showed promise of a bright future. They wanted a girl to build to star proportions, along with their promising Vic Damone and Frankie Laine. One look at Patti, and a short talk convinced the astute Mercury officials. They signed her to a long-term contract. The proof that their judgment was correct is right there in their record sales book on the page titled "Page." It shows ever-increasing sales of her records.

Her recordings of things like *Confess, So In Love, Goody Goodbye, Money, Marbles and Chalk, Just Got To Have Him Around* and *With My Eyes Wide Open* (on which she sings all four parts as The Patti Page Quartet) are best sellers and disc jockey favorites. In fact, *So In Love* was voted number one by the country's platter spinners in the most-played and most-requested categories. It was also a top retail disc seller and jukebox favorite.

THE REAL PROOF that she had arrived on the treshhold of success was when the people in the music business voted her "The Most Promising Female Vocalist in the Music Business" in *Billboard,* top show-business publication. The observant music business crowd knows how to pick winners and they haven't been disappointed in Patti since making their choice.

Her latest personal appearances are added proof that Patti has come a long way since her local radio station days. Patti has charmed audiences at places like the Sherman Hotel in Chicago, the Click in Philadelphia, Café Society in New York and many others. When this article went to press, Patti was sharing honors with the fine Johnny Long band at the Hotel New Yorker. She so impressed booking agents that they signed her for an appearance at the famous New York Roxy Theater and she'll probably be in there when this reaches print.

Patti's appeal isn't hard to explain. She's very pretty, looks like the girl the high school graduating class voted "Most Attractive," and is as natural as the girl all the fellows in school had that secret crush on. She sings with her heart, as well as her voice. She can sing anything from a sentimental ballad to a jivey jump tune.

Our own personal favorites are *Goody Goodbye* (which she'll sing whenever she sees us in the room) and *Oklahoma Blues.* We've heard her do the latter about fifty times in person and never get tired of it. The last chorus, where she really shouts the blues, always has the place rocking with a solid beat. It's that infectious. And when Patti gives out with that warm smile of hers from the floor, it's enough to melt the ice in the coke at your table!

The words are important to Patti. "I have to have lyrics I can sing with feeling. If the lyrics are no good, I can't do them," she said.

An interesting thing to note is that the motto of her home state, when translated, reads "Labor Conquers All Things." And it certainly applies to Patti. The reward

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for her labor is a spot a million other talented and ambitious youngsters would give anything to have.

To tell you a little more of the personal side of Patti, you'll be interested to note that she has shining blue eyes, long dark blonde hair. She weighs one hundred eighteen pounds, which are distributed tastefully throughout her five feet four inches. She's a humorist, but not in the "wiseguy" sense of the word. When asked, "What would you like to do with your records?" Patti said, "Sell them!" We rephrased the question to, "What would you like to do *on* your records?" Patti said, "To show that I'm versatile and can sing any kind of tune."

Her most embarrassing moment happened in Minneapolis. "I always wanted to look taller, so I bought shoes with five-inch platforms. I walked grandly out on the stage and promptly fell down! I'll never forget it!"

Patti always liked radio best of all entertainment fields, "until television came along." And television has had an interesting effect on her fan mail. Requests for her pictures have about doubled since she's been on television. Take a look at the picture accompanying this article and you'll understand why.

Her favorites? "Johnny Long is my favorite band. His ensemble tunes like *Shantytown* are grand. And his orchestra did the best job we've ever had of backing me up when I sing in the show." Her favorite towns are the four in which most of her friends live: New York, Cincinnati, Milwaukee and Philadelphia. Ella Fitzgerald and Tony Martin are her favorite singers. She likes to swim, ride, to sew and paint. She likes all kinds of music and thinks "I might like opera, if I knew anything about it."

She's never excited, although we've seen her in some situations that would fluster many a performer. But Patti is very easy-going. Perhaps that's one reason she's had such an easy-going trip to the top!

If you'd like a photo of PATTI PAGE, address a postal to: Buddy Basch, New Love Magazine, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

### APPETIZING ALBUM

*Nancy Goes To Rio* is the appetizing album of the month. It features singing by Ann Sothern, Jane Powell, Carmen Miranda and Danny Scholl. There are six tunes in the album and probably the best are Carmen's *Yipsee-I-O* and her *Ca-Room Pa Pa*. What Carmen does to the first one is something to hear. She tells all about the wild west and why she likes it. But the way she tells it isn't like any west we ever heard of! Wow! Danny Scholl ought to go far on the basis of this album and his romantic singing. The tunes are from the picture of the same name.

### BEST SINGLE RECORDS

**★ DOROTHY SHAY (Columbia)**

*Fargo Fanny*

This is a sly and clever tune about a girl "who did things within the law." She did things like murder, kidnap, blackmail and commit arson. But she was such a lovely girl, with a sense of humor, that it seems she had the knack of getting away with it. And Dorothy has the knack of telling us about it entertainingly.

**★ FONTANE SISTERS (Victor)**

*The Cinderella Work Song*

The Fontane Sisters, who sing on Perry Como's radio and television shows, do a wonderfully workman-like job on the song from Walt Disney's *Cinderella*. They do some close harmony work and some fine individual singing on this record. We

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should hear a lot more of them, if they make records as good as this side.

### ★ ARTIE SHAW (MGM)

*The Glider*
*What Is This Thing Called Love*

This is a re-issue of two tunes that came out on another label some years back. And they are two of the best tunes you're likely to find on any one platter. MGM has outdone themselves this time. *The Glider* is an instrumental tune in the old Artie Shaw tradition. He sounds like the Shaw that made such a great name for himself with his fine band. And the back, *What Is This Thing Called Love,* features a vocal by Mel Torme and The Mel-Tones. They give a mildly bop flavor to the tune.

### ★ JOHNNY LONG (King)

*Silver Dollar Song*
*Dixie*

Johnny Long follows his latest two hit platters *(We'll Build a Bungalow* and *All the Bees Are Buzzin')* with a platter that is probably the best thing he has done since his all-time famous *Shantytown. The Silver Dollar Song* is one of those things that Johnny and his gang do so well. It's bound to be a hit. The back is done in the style that made Johnny famous. The band sings and plays *Dixie,* which could be Southerner Johnny's theme! It's bright, bouncy and terrific!

### ★ XAVIER CUGAT (Columbia)

*The Goombay*

This is a peppy rhumba "numba." It's about the authentic African dances that are so well-known in Bermuda.

### ★ TONY MARTIN (Victor)

*There's No Tomorrow*
*A Thousand Violins*

This has been called "the greatest record Tony Martin ever made." It must come mighty close to that. *There's No Tomorrow* is Tony's virile version of the old Italian favorite *O Sole Mio.* Tony's vibrant singing of the tune will make thousands of new friends for him. The back is a warm and tender ballad.

### ★ NORO MORALES (MGM)

*110th Street and 5th Avenue*

An exciting instrumental with a different beat. This describes musically the section of New York known as "Spanish Harlem." There are some good individual passages and fine overall work.

### ★ DICK CONTINO (Horace Heidt)

*Lady of Spain*
*Malaguena*
*12th Street Rag*

These are the discs by the Horace Heidt discovery who recently made such a hit on his nation-wide tour. We met Dick in New York and were very much impressed with his sincerity and talent. *Lady of Spain* is flashy, he treats the Lecuona tune, *Malaguena,* with sensitive fingering and on *12th Street Rag* he's all over the accordion. A talented young fellow who has started on the road to fame. We will all be watching him and wishing him luck.

### DORIS DAY (Columbia)

*Save A Little Sun Beam*
*Mama What'll I Do?*

The first tune features a vocal by Doris and some funny dialogue as she tries to teach Ray Noble the tune. It's worth hearing. The back, *Mama What'll I Do,* features some Dixieland and cute singing. This isn't Doris' best but it's good. You'll recognize it as the old *In and Out the Window.*

### ★ IRVING FIELDS (Victor)

*Wedding Samba*

This is the tune that was introduced and "plugged" by Art Ford on his radio show. It's a peppy and pleasant instrumental, sparked by Field's tinkley piano work.

### ★ BLUE BARRON (MGM)

*Big Movie Show in the Sky*

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Probably one of the best records of the year is Blue's disc. The lyrics and tune are great, the production is wonderful. Sound like a rave? It is! The tune is from the Broadway show, *Texas Li'l Darlin'*.

### ★ THE MODERNAIRES (Columbia)

*There's Something About a Home Town Band*

With sound effects (glockenspiel and all) and fine vocal work, the Modernaires create the excitement and color of a home town band. There are clever lyrics and good production work here like few records have these days.

### ★ PERRY COMO (Victor)

*Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo*
*I Wanna Go Home With You*

The tunes mentioned are on two different discs (not backed). However, they are both records any Como fan will have to get. The first is the medium-bouncy type thing Perry does with so much charm, with an assist by the Fontane Sisters. The second number finds the same old gang with a very cute little production type thing. Perry keeps getting better and better and these two discs will give you an idea of why.

### ★ JOHNNY DESMOND (MGM)

*C'est Si Bon*

All this is French for "It's so good." And good is what his record is too. "Desmo" takes this at a medium-slow pace and comes out with a foot-tapping arrangement. Johnny has the same Como-type relaxed voice, which he doesn't seem to unleash for ballads. However, on something like this he lets it be heard and it's mighty good. This is one of his best in a long time. More, Johnny!

### ★ ROSEMARY CLOONEY (Columbia)

*Why Don't You Haul Off and Love Me*

This is one of those cornball, hand-clapping things with silly lyrics. But Rosemary sings very pleasantly and Hugo Winterhalter has a fine arrangement here.

### ★ TONY MARTIN (Victor)

*Speak a Word of Love*
*Remember*

Tony is doing great versions of everything he's waxed lately. This is no exception to his streak of successes. Fran Warren helps out on these duets. *Remember* is the Irving Berlin standard tune and *Speak a Word of Love* is a new thing, but both are treated to tasteful singing and arrangement.

### ★ SLIM GAILLARD (MGM)

*Little Red Riding Wood*

A nonsense rhythm song that cleverly and brightly includes every type wood you're ever heard mentioned. Slim and his trio sing and play on this entertaining disc.

### ★ LISA KIRK (Victor)

*Charley, My Boy*

This marks the record début of Lisa Kirk, long of the New York stage and radio. She's the young star of *Kiss Me Kate*, who did the show-stopping version of *Always True To You In My Fashion*. On *Charley, My Boy*, she shows she has what it takes to put over a song on record as well as in the theater. Sprightly and brightly done, this is a perky song, very fitting to up-and-coming Lisa Kirk.

### ★ SPIKE JONES (Victor)

*Morpheus*
*Wild Bill Hiccup*

*Morpheus* is based on the Offenbach tune. But what happens to it, shouldn't happen to any serious composer! Mad nonsense and music (I think that's what it is) make up this side. The back, *Wild Bill Hiccup*, is a zany story of the Wild West in typical Spike Jones fashion. One you'll like, incidentally and get a big kick out of.

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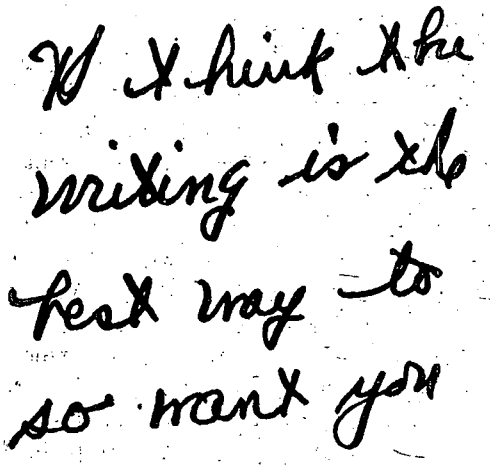
(Continued from page 12)

personality. The seldom-seen perfect "o" indicates one who has much perception. And the loopy looking "t" at the very end of her signature indicates that like the rest of us girls she enjoys a good chat



Note the unusual "t" in the example given above, then read this letter from Rachel L.:

*Dear Mary Frances:*
*My handwriting is so very different. It cuts down, is messy, and unladylike. I don't know what I really am like as I live where women are the inferior members of the family. I hate it, and I think I would rebel, given the chance. Please analyze me.*
*Rachel L.*

By nature you are a strong, forceful, practical person. That heavy writing shows your practical side, your desire to accomplish many things. The unusual "t" crossing indicates a definite determination to have your own way even if you battle for it. It is most unusual for anyone with this kind of writing to stay "inferior."

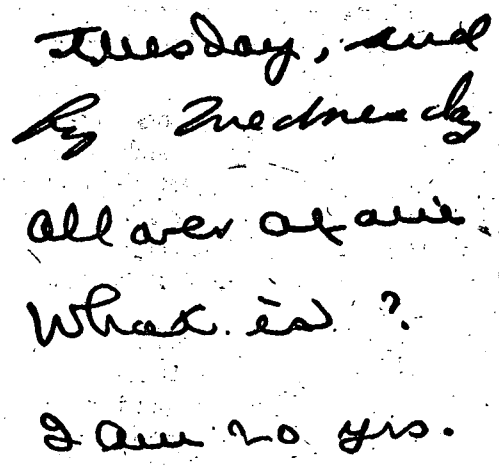
You are definitely an individual and will most likely assert yourself when the right time comes.

Do you have a handwriting which slants in numerous directions? Read Wilma's letter. Her problem may well be yours:

*Dear Miss Frances:*
*Although I am twenty years old I never seem to know my own mind. I think I like a boy on Monday, love him Tuesday, dislike him by Wednesday and have discarded him Thursday. I'm old enough to be sensible, yet this love-him, leave-him attitude exists in spite of my knowledge.*
*What is wrong?*
*Wilma*

If you were older the answer would be "fickle," but at your age it is simply that your emotions have not yet caught up with you. We all grow up physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally. You are twenty years of age on the first three, and immature on the last point. This is not strange at all, for most of us do grow faster or slower in one of these phases.

The variation in slant in your handwriting is the clue, for the slant is the "love



register." It tells how affectionate, how demonstrative you are. It tells whether you are aloof, hard-hearted, or warm. Each degree of slant gives a clue. You have at least eight different slants in the sample of your writing shown here.

All of which means that in the few minutes it took to write that you have eight variations on your emotions.

And what does that mean in practical language? Simply that you are not ready for serious thinking about marriage; that you are not ready for marriage. It means you should have friends, but not expect to marry each one.

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Be patient, for this isn't as drastic as it sounds. The only drastic part could be marrying while in one of these moods, marrying on the impulse.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Q.** *Is it true that our handwriting undergoes changes during vacations, various stages of our life?*

**A.** Oddly enough handwriting often undergoes a change during a vacation. This is due to a sudden letdown, a tendency to rest quite a bit. The most noticeable feature is that the little letters "m" and "n" resemble a "u". Bodily indolence is the technical and graphological reason!

**Q.** *Are there any physical factors which might influence the handwriting, thus the analysis?*

**A.** Numerous physical factors have a tendency to influence the handwriting. Thus analysts always suggest that you send a sample of your natural writing when being analyzed. Often the newness of a pen, difficulty of writing position, awkwardness of writing position, will be apparent to the trained eye, but it is best, for your own good, to submit natural writing. Use the pen you prefer, your favorite color ink and paper. Be comfortable when you write. One young man once sent me a "phony" writing and asked for an analysis of it, little realizing that he was paying for information which was true of the handwriting being analyzed, but not true of himself. Do you give a doctor wrong symptoms, or a bank an incorrect signature?

**Q.** *Do the Japanese and Chinese have a handwriting similar to ours?*

**A.** The Chinese do not have an alphabet as we do, nor have they the same phonetic way of spelling. Their early scholars drew pictures to demonstrate their thoughts, even as our cavemen and early ancestors did. Throughout the years the pictures have come down, stripped of nonessentials, but still obvious to those who have studied ideographs.

The Chinese have six various phases of ideographs, some which are direct, indirect, inversive, etc. One of these six divisions has forty thousand signs. A Chinese wanting to mention "sunset" would draw a line for the horizon, and a small sun underneath it. If he wanted to mention "barking" he would draw the symbol for dog, and the symbol for mouth. This picture-writing tells its own story.

The Japanese use Chinese characters, but have developed an alphabet of forty-seven letters, patterned after our own style.

Send this coupon and a sample of handwriting with 10c and a stamped self-addressed envelope to:

**Mary Frances, c/o New Love Magazine**
**205 East 42nd Street**
**New York 17, N. Y.**

**May, 1950**

**NAME** .....

**STREET ADDRESS**.....

**CITY**..... **STATE**.....

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# A Touch of Romance

By HELEN ERSKINE

Barbara was beautiful and aristocratic, like the girls who bought the ten-dollar gloves, Katie thought.



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***What's a two-week vacation without it? Only for Katie and Don it could add up to a lifetime of heartache.***

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Dear Deception

KATIE DROPPED into the deck chair beside the big tile swimming pool. For a moment her blue eyes roved over the scene before her—the immense pool, the gaily colored chairs and



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hammocks scattered all around it, protected by huge beach umbrellas. Then she closed her eyes and lay back with an elaborate pretense of boredom. It was no part of her plan to act like a shop girl on vacation, even though she was one.

But her spirits were too bubbly to let her eyes stay closed. When she opened them her lips curved in an exultant little smile as she realized that this was *it*—the thing she had worked and saved for these three long years. She, Katie McCreery, was actually here at Palm City, one of Southern California's swankest resorts. *She* was a guest at this wonderful hotel!

Too late she realized that she had been looking straight at a tall, bronzed young man when she had permitted that smile to touch her lips. He was just emerging from the pool, a towel draped carelessly around his neck, and he was obviously going to do something about that smile. He was advancing toward her, a bold grin on his face.

Katie frowned, and opened a magazine.

"Reading in the sun is bad for the eyes. And a girl with big blue eyes like yours should be especially careful."

Katie tried to ignore him. After all, she hadn't come down to Palm City with the idea of engaging in any cheap flirtations.

But she couldn't ignore him any longer because he had gently removed the magazine from her hand. She glanced up angrily, but almost at once her anger died. He wasn't being fresh, he was just friendly. And all at once she knew that a person can get a little lonely, even in luxurious surroundings. Because she *had* been lonely, she knew now, or her heart wouldn't be responding so warmly to his smile.

"Shall I be conventional and ask if we've met somewhere before, or shall I just say, 'Hello, beautiful?' " He smiled down at her.

"You might say, 'Hello, Katie,' " she smiled back at him. Why not be friendly? A few minutes of pleasant conversation certainly wouldn't do her any harm now.

He dragged a deck chair close to hers. "Hello, Katie," he said. "And now the snappy comeback to that is, 'Hello, Don.' "

"Hello, Don."

They both laughed, and then he told her that his name was Donald Whitney, and she said she was Kathleen McCreery. When he asked her if she'd care to go swimming she jumped at the chance. She'd been wanting to try the pool ever since she'd checked in two days ago, but she hadn't wanted to go in alone. She confessed, though, that she wasn't a very good swimmer.

"Maybe I can help you," he told her, grinning.

SHE SOON SAW the reason for the grin. Teaching a person to swim involves quite a bit of personal contact. She wondered with a bit of indignation if he could possibly think she was pretending not to be a good swimmer just to give him an excuse to put his arms around her. At the idea her heart fluttered with anger, and it got worse every time he touched her. She had never been so angry in her life. Or at least she had never reacted like this—with pounding heart, and quickened breath, and a strange delirium confusing her brain.

"I'll hold you, and you just practice your kicking," he told her.

His arms went around her and obediently she began to kick. But the idea returned that he might think she was just pretending not to be a good swimmer.

"I think I've got it now," she said.

She broke away from him, and kicking off from the side of the pool, plunged to the bottom. When she came up, eyes closed, she felt something against her lips. She was so astonished that she forgot all about swimming and would have gone to the bottom again if strong arms hadn't held her. They continued to hold her, while the pressure of the lips increased.

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"You—you shouldn't have done that," she said shakily, when he finally let her go.

He laughed gently, and then she realized why. She hadn't done a thing to get away from that kiss. Only when it was over had she thought to object. There was no telling what he thought of her. She didn't even know what to think of herself. Katie McCreery was not the type who kissed freely. And that fluttering she had felt in her heart . . .

Using the strong new stroke Don had taught her, Katie streaked for the side of the pool and pulled herself up. She ran toward the dressing rooms, pulling off her cap as she went, and shaking out short blonde curls.

She felt a hand on her arm, a gentle but compelling hand. She turned around and found that the brown eyes that had been full of nothing but laughter since she had first looked into them were now contrite.

"Katie, I'm awfully sorry. Won't you please forgive me?"

His unhappiness caught at her heart. She started to tell him that she didn't blame him for the kiss at all, that she was only running away to hide her embarrassment for having accepted it so readily. But she stopped herself. Society girls were probably trained to be less frank than that, and she mustn't forget what she was pretending to be.

She frowned a little before she permitted herself to smile her forgiveness. His own smile then was wonderful to see. He put both hands on her arms and for just a moment she thought he was going to repeat the offense. Her breath caught in her throat at the very thought.

But he didn't kiss her. "Where shall we have lunch?" he asked instead.

Katie felt a sudden, unexplainable fear at the simple question. All at once she realized on what unfamiliar ground she was walking. All she knew about Don Whitney was that he was young and disturbingly handsome, in spite of the fact that his features were craggy rather than classic. That his eyes were dark and friendly, and that his brown hair curled when it was wet, as it did now. Oh, yes, and one thing more—that being near him did something to her heart that nothing else had ever done before.

"We don't have to have lunch at the hotel if you're tired of that," he was saying, almost pleadingly. "We could take a ride out to the Wigwam, or . . ."

Refusal wasn't in her—not when his eyes were so wistful and his tone so pleading. Besides, the Wigwam was a famous restaurant and she was dying to see it. But it was the sort of place a girl just can't go to alone.

"I'll be ready in a half-hour," she told him, with a quick smile.

She went up to her room, and decided all at once that this was definitely the time to wear the blue linen suit she had been saving for some special occasion. The blue exactly matched the delphinium of her eyes, and showed off to the perfection the gleaming gold of her hair. It did things to her small figure, too—things that only an expensive model can do.

She hadn't spared anything to be properly dressed for her big two weeks, and suddenly she knew that it was going to be worth all the sacrifices she had made. All the missed lunches, all the long walks to save trolley fare, and everything else.

When she went down to the lobby Don was waiting for her. He had changed into a handsomely tailored Palm Beach suit, which he wore with the same easy grace as his swim trunks. His eyes lit with admiration when they fell on her and once again she was glad that she had decided on this adventure. How else could she have met such an exciting man?

He led her to his car, and now it was all Katie could do to keep from gasping aloud. The car was a custom-made dream, dark green with matching leather uphol-

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stery. She got hold of herself just in time. Don Whitney was apparently quite wealthy, and she was a little dismayed at the idea. Still, Palm City was an exclusive resort, and she should have realized that the people she'd meet there would match it.

AS DON SWUNG the car out of the hotel driveway and onto the highway, Katie reminded herself of something else. For three years she had deprived herself of every luxury that makes life pleasant so that for two weeks she could live the life of a society girl, the kind who came into the store and bought ten-dollar gloves. Maybe they weren't any happier than the girls who waited on them, but it had become an obsession with her to have a taste of their kind of life. Her savings had gone into a wardrobe that would make her look the part. She had made up her mind to play the part of a gay debutante. And now she wasn't going to spoil it all by acting like a wide-eyed little shop girl. No, she must stick to her original plan—to act and feel and *think* that she belonged to the Palm City crowd.

She glanced around idly. "Oh, what's that?" she asked in an interested but unexcited tone. They were passing what appeared to be a country club set far back off the highway in the shelter of countless palms.

Don smiled, a little sheepishly. "Be it ever so humble—"

"That's your home?" Katie asked, now unable to keep the awe out of her tone. He must be immensely wealthy if he lived in that huge sprawling mansion!

He seemed to think she disapproved of it. "Blame it all on oil," he said. "We were honest farmers until Dad went digging for water one day and struck oil instead."

Before Katie had a chance to make any comment, a sharp turn in the road threw her against him. She started to move away, but she found a strong arm around her shoulders, holding her where she was. She looked up and found Don's dark eyes smiling down at her. It was an intimate smile that seemed to draw her even closer than his arm was doing. And she found she didn't want to draw away, after all. She relaxed against him, refusing to listen to a small warning voice that told her she was getting in too deep:

This was only an interlude. In less than two weeks she would be back behind the glove counter. She'd never see Don Whitney again. He belonged to this fabulous world of Palm City, while she was only a tourist.

But her heart refused to listen to any warning. It purred like a kitten when Don pulled her closer. She silenced the little voice finally by deciding that she would enjoy every minute she had with Don, but that definitely she would not think of him as having any part in her future. He would furnish the touch of romance that would make her vacation complete, but that was all.

THE WIGWAM was out of this world—at least any world that Katie had ever known. For all its pretense of being a primitive Indian dwelling, it had every comfort and luxury imaginable. Don asked for a table on a wide terrace that overlooked an exotic cactus garden. Silent, moccasined waiters served rare dishes that Katie hadn't ever even heard of.

Over dessert Don said, "Well, you know about me now, so give. I want to know everything there is to know about you." He had told her that scientific farming was his hobby; that he had several hundred acres up in the San Fernando Valley where he spent most of his time.

What could she tell him? Well, what else but the story she had decided on in case of just such an emergency? She

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could change her mind and tell him the truth about herself, but if she did, her whole vacation would be ruined. He'd start treating her as if she were different—perhaps watching himself for fear of saying something that would hurt her. At the very best he'd treat her like an outsider, and for these two weeks she wanted to belong—with just such people as Don Whitney.

She gave a little shrug. "Oh, what is there to a girl's life?" she sighed. "You know how it is. Boarding school, parties, a debut, and then more parties." Those were the things she had dreamed of during the lonely, poverty-stricken years in the foster home the county had put her in after the accident that robbed her of her parents.

"I just got fed up with the social whirl and came down here for a rest," she ended.

His gaze was sympathetic. "I know how you feel," he said. "I hate the social life, too. If Mother and Dad didn't get such a kick out of it I'd move up to the ranch and never go to another formal party the rest of my life."

They got along even better after that. And at times Katie actually forgot the great barrier of wealth between them. So many of the things that interested them both had nothing to do with money.

They drove back to Palm City, and suddenly both of them grew silent. "It's almost over," Katie told herself. "He's killed a day that would otherwise be dull away from the ranch life he loves, but there's no reason to think I'll see him again." She was surprised at how much the thought hurt.

When they drove up in front of the hotel Don said, "What shall we do tonight? Dine and dance? I understand there's a good band right here at the hotel."

"Oh, I'd love that," Katie breathed. So it wasn't over—not yet! She was going to have one more heavenly date. And she wouldn't think beyond that.

Toward evening she looked her wardrobe over carefully and decided that nothing flattered her quite so wonderfully as the blue net with the wide, ankle-length skirt, and its own sequinned stole. Yes, that was what she would wear on what she felt sure was going to be the most thrilling date of her life.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Heavenly Date

KATIE WAS ONLY half dressed when the telephone rang. She couldn't imagine who would be calling her. Her "hello" was rather listless. Then suddenly her breath caught in her throat. That deep, friendly voice could belong to no one but Don Whitney.

"Katie, dear," he was saying, "I wonder if you would mind putting off that dancing date at the hotel for a while? We have a friend, Barbara Allison, visiting us from Los Angeles, and both she and Mother wanted to give a little party for you out here at the house tonight. I could come in and get you at the time we agreed on. Of course if you had especially counted on the hotel—"

"Oh, of course not," Katie cut in. "I think that's very kind of your mother and—Miss Allison. I'll be ready at eight."

She hung up, and suddenly she felt frightened and ill at ease. Who was Barbara Allison?

Katie finished dressing, but without the enthusiasm she had felt before the telephone rang. She hadn't meant to lie to anyone—only to herself. She had wanted to feel completely at ease in the luxurious surroundings of Palm City, and she had decided she couldn't do that unless she actually felt like a real society girl. She had built up such a story for her own benefit, not to deceive other

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people. But it seemed to be getting out of hand, for Don was involved now. He had no doubt mentioned that she was a society girl, and Barbara Allen and his mother were entertaining her under that impression.

When she met him in the lobby she had an impulse to tell him the whole story, but he held her off for a moment and gazed so admiringly at her, that she couldn't bear to see the light in his eyes turn into anger or contempt.

"A fine position you've put me in," he might say. No, she'd see it through, at least for tonight.

A half hour later she braced herself for the meeting with his parents and Barbara.

She liked his folks instantly. Mr. Whitney was a tall, powerfully built man, and although it had been a good many years since he had struggled with the earth to make a living, he still had the farmer's look of toughness and pride. Mrs. Whitney was a plump friendly woman. They both greeted Katie pleasantly, but there was a questioning look in their eyes. Almost a fearful look, it seemed.

Before she had time to wonder about this, a beautiful girl came up and slipped an arm through Don's. She was tall and dark and aristocratic-looking—like those girls who bought the ten-dollar gloves, Katie thought.

"Well, this must be Miss McCreery." Barbara Allen was smiling, but her eyes were cold.

"Oh, hello, Barbara," Don greeted her. "Yes, this is Katie, and Katie, this is Barbara Allison. I'm hoping you girls will call each other by your first names."

Barbara looked as though she would like to call Katie plenty of things besides her first name. And Katie knew why. Because Barbara acted as if Don belonged to her. For all her beauty, there was something in the coldness of her dark eyes and the set of her spare lips that Katie disliked. Such a girl was incapable of love.

"Mother made me promise to take Katie on a tour of the grounds," Don said.

"Oh, of course. I'll see you both later," Barbara answered. "I'm sure Katie and I will find a great deal to talk about."

Katie felt as if she had been rescued from a dragon when Don took her arm and led her outside. He showed her around the castle-like estate, where flood lights illuminated extensive formal gardens, a huge swimming pool, and all kinds of recreational facilities.

BY THE TIME they returned to the house the tempo of the party had increased. Katie felt completely out of place among the gay young people, most of whom obviously were Barbara's friends. Apparently Barbara spent a great deal of time at Palm City, as a guest of the Whitneys. Don seemed fond of her, and his parents almost dotingly so. Don had told her that Barbara would some day inherit a great fortune.

The young people were outwardly friendly to Katie, but there was an undercurrent of hostility in their manner that shattered what little poise she might have had in such unfamiliar surroundings.

She hid her nervousness as much as possible under an air of boredom. Don accepted it as such and murmured, "I know you're bored, dear, and we'll clear out of here as soon as it's decent to."

But her attitude didn't fool Barbara. When Don went to greet some new arrivals Barbara swooped down on her.

"Let's go freshen up a bit, shall we?" She took Katie's arm and all but dragged her along.

In the powder room she made no pretense of "freshening up," She sat down and lit a cigarette, regarding Katie with aloof, dark eyes.

"Don tells me you're from San Fran-

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cisco," she said, after a moment. She was smiling, but it wasn't a nice smile—it made Katie's blood run cold.

"Yes, I am," Katie said, wishing she could deny it. She had the feeling she was falling into a trap.

"He tells me that you got fed up with the social whirl, and just had to get away for a rest."

"Yes, it does get tiring. Parties, and . . ."

She was in too deep now to ever get out. All she could do was stick to her guns, and go down fighting. Barbara suspected she wasn't what she pretended to be, but she couldn't know for sure.

"You must know a lot of people I know," Barbara went on. "I suppose you went to Miss Elwoods, or—"

"No, I went to public school." Katie managed a little laugh. "My father had some sort of notion about that. So I probably don't know any of your friends after all."

"Oh, but you must!" Barbara insisted. "You couldn't possibly have made your debut in San Francisco without knowing the Emersons, and Mrs.—"

"I didn't make my debut in San Francisco," Katie put in desperately. "Mother insisted on my going back East, where she was presented. And now I'd better get back to the party. I imagine Don is looking for me."

"He probably is," Barbara agreed with what was almost a leer. "He's terribly susceptible to blondes."

Katie gritted her teeth, but said nothing. When she got back to the party she was rewarded by Don's warm greeting.

"What do you say we get out of here," he whispered. "I see that Barbara and her friends are going to work on the champagne, so they won't miss us."

It took her only a second to get her evening wrap, and the minute she was in the car with Don, flashing through the starlit night, all memories of Barbara and her prying were forgotten. Barbara might eventually get Don, but she didn't have him now. He had an arm around Katie McCreery, and Katie was happier than she had ever been in her life.

She wondered now how she could have imagined having a perfect time on her vacation without a touch of romance. Sudddenly all the things she had planned seemed meaningless without this—a strong arm around her shoulders, a deep pleasant voice talking tender nonsense. And above all the sure knowledge that soon his lips would find hers, and that this time it would not be a half-teasing kiss, like the one in the swimming pool.

THEY DROVE almost until dawn. Where she didn't know or care. But in the first light of the new day Don stopped the car on the outskirts of a sleeping town and took her into his arms. His lips sought hers and found them, but they lingered only briefly. Then he held her off and smiled, his face touched by the glow of the sunrise.

"We have lots of time for that, haven't we, Katie? And it will mean more if we don't rush it."

She turned away from him to hide the quick tears that sprang to her eyes. Perhaps this was the time to tell him that she'd soon be leaving Palm City. That if they had kisses to share they had better share them now. But a girl couldn't say things like that, and besides, if she told him the truth now it might spoil what was left of her wonderful vacation. At the very best he might pity her—a girl who had had to work and sacrifice for three years, to save a sum of money that he might spend in one evening. And she didn't want his pity. Perhaps when she was ready to leave she would tell him the truth.

Or possibly she might slip out of his life without even that. In resorts, things like this probably happened all the time.

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A man and a girl meet, go around together, and make a little love, but it doesn't mean a thing, really. Not a thing.

She caught back a sob that threatened to burst in her throat and turned back to him with a bright smile. This was a vacation romance—if romance it might be called—and she wasn't going to ruin it with tears.

They had breakfast in a little all-night café, and the morning was well advanced when he dropped her at her hotel, with the promise that they would spend the next day together.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Piece of Her Heart

THEY DID SPEND the next day together, and several succeeding days. Barbara tried hard to arrange other parties, but Katie had no trouble getting out of them. She just reminded Don that sort of thing was what she had come down to Palm City to avoid. He seemed happy to have it that way.

They swam and played tennis and rode horseback. They lunched and dined and danced. They chattered gaily, and talked seriously, or were silent. Katie decided she liked best the times when Don talked about his ranch and what he hoped to do with it. He had studied deeply world's food problems and he was carrying out experiments that he hoped would be of great value in raising the nutritional standard of needy people. His eyes glowed when he talked of it, and she knew that it was the most important thing in his life.

For hours at a time she let herself forget how soon it would all be over for her—the play and the talk—and the occasional kisses they shared. Then at last she let herself face the fact that she had only four days left. It was Thursday, and on Monday morning she had to be back at work.

She and Don were dining and dancing at the hotel that night and she dressed with great care. She wore a white marquisette dress that left her shoulders bare, and brought out the soft apricot of her tan.

"Pardon me if I just stare for a minute," Don said, when he met her in the lobby.

His dark eyes traveled slowly from her silver slippers to the golden hair which softly framed her small face in an almost worshipful gaze.

Later, when they were dancing, he held her close. "You know, I've been puzzled about something," he said, "but now I have the answer. You're not really more beautiful tonight than you have been. It's just that I'm seeing you with new eyes—the eyes of love," he whispered.

"Oh, Don!" It was a tremulous cry that sprang from the very core of her being. Don loved her! And now when she gazed up into his face she was looking at him with new eyes, too. The eyes of love, just as he had said. She knew now that she had been in love with him almost from the very first, but she had hidden the truth from herself because she hadn't dared to dream that he would ever return her feeling. But now he was telling her he did. Her heart beat with such mad joy that it seemed ready to burst.

Then she realized suddenly that she must lose no time in telling him the truth about herself. She had no fear of telling him now, because he loved her and love means understanding.

HE HAD DANCED her over to the open doors that led to the terrace. He took her hand and led her down the terrace steps and along a garden path. She was glad. Out under the stars wealth and social position seem very unimportant. This would be the perfect place to tell him.

He stopped finally in front of a bench in the arch of a trellised vine, and when

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he pulled her down beside him she knew just what he was going to say. But she had something to say first. She raised her face to his.

But she had no chance to speak. He took her swiftly, hungrily into his arms. He kissed her so warmly and thrillingly that instantly everything else was forgotten. They were in a magic world of white moonlight, with the perfume of a hundred flowers making the moment unbearably sweet.

When he released her finally she was breathless and dazed. She was reluctant to leave the magic world that she had just discovered. Some remnant of her mind still clung to it, even when Don settled back in the bench with her head on his shoulder, and started to talk companionably.

"It's wonderful to know that you love me, Katie," he was saying. "I hardly dared to hope. With your background of wealth and social position, to say nothing of your beauty and charm, you could have any man you wanted. But you want me! That's real love, darling!"

His words brought her sharply back to reality. She had something to tell him and she'd better tell it at once. She straightened up and faced him.

But before she could speak, he went on with a chuckle. "You know, it's a good thing you *are* a society girl. Otherwise I'd be in for a bad time. I made my folks a solemn promise not so long ago that I wouldn't become engaged to any girl who isn't."

"What!" Katie gasped.

He laughed aloud now. "Oh, they're not snobs," he said. "Far from it. They were tickled to death when I got engaged to a waitress not long ago. They thought she was the sweetest little thing they'd ever seen. But Barbara didn't think so. She went to the gal and told her the family had decided she wasn't suitable for me, and that they would give her ten thousand dollars to leave me alone. When she convinced the girl I had no money of my own she accepted the offer in a hurry."

"Oh," Katie moaned. She was trying to think, but she couldn't. She could only understand that Don had been deeply hurt, and that he probably wasn't entirely over it yet.

"I wrote some letters to the next one," he said. "Her boy friend took charge of them and tried to blackmail me." He sighed. "I've tried not to let such experiences destroy my faith in human nature, but I'm afraid they just about have. And there's no doubt about it where the folks are concerned. They finally got me to promise that I wouldn't even go with a girl unless her social position put her above suspicion. I promised, partly because I was so broken up at the time that I didn't think I'd ever take another girl seriously. Luckily they can have no doubts about you," he finished.

"Wh—what would happen, though, if you had fallen in love with someone else—say, a working girl?" Katie managed to say.

He frowned for a moment, pondering her question. He couldn't know how her heart was standing still, waiting for his answer. How it was praying to hear some happy solution, even while it sagged under the weight of knowing that there was no solution.

"I can't imagine loving anyone but you," he said finally. "But if I did fall in love with a working girl, I guess I'd just have to break my promise to the folks. It was a rash promise, anyway, and they'd hardly be justified in holding me to it."

Her heart began to lift a little. Of course they would release him from such a promise. Her lips opened to pour out the truth, but suddenly he went on.

"No, I'm kidding myself," he said, "Dad *would* hold me to it. He has a thousand wonderful qualities but I think

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he learned stubbornness from one of the mules we used to have on the farm. He told me if I ever broke my promise he'd disinherit me, to be sure the family fortune didn't fall into the hands of a golddigger. And he would. Not that that would make any difference. If I had fallen in love with a poor girl I'd kiss the family fortune good-bye without a moment's regret."

THE NEXT MOMENT he swept her into his arms and kissed her soundly. "Here we're getting practically morbid, and over nothing," he said. "And that's silly, considering how many exciting things we have to talk about. What kind of wedding do you want, darling? A big, formal one, or can I possibly persuade you to run off to a justice of the peace?"

She didn't answer, and then she didn't need to because he was holding her close again and covering her lips with his own. Her lips were numb at first and she was passive in his arms. She knew now what she had to do but her mind shied away from facing it. She couldn't think, couldn't feel.

Then painfully she forced herself to face the truth. She had to go away. Even though Don would be willing to break his promise to his parents and marry her, she couldn't let him do it. It would mean separating him from his family, besides ruining him financially. Already he had told her that his ranch was not yet on a paying basis and might not be for years. Without the family fortune behind him he'd have to give it up, and with it his dreams of improving the lot of humanity.

And even worse than that, she realized, he might not believe her. He might think that she was a golddigger as those others had been, and had kept the truth from him only until she felt he was so deeply in love with her it would be safe to tell him anything.

Her heart ached so unbearably that only the warmth of his kisses could ease it. She took them frantically, while her arms went around his neck, straining him to her. This was for always. This was all she would ever have.

She lay with her head buried against his shoulder finally, and she couldn't quite hold back the sobs. They were deep, racking sobs, but somehow she managed to get a little laugh into her voice when she answered his worried questions.

"A girl doesn't get engaged every night," she quavered. "You'll have to forgive me for being a little upset."

"Of course," he soothed. Then he pulled her to her feet. "I'm going to take you right up to your room," he said. "We'll make our plans tomorrow."

At her door he kissed her tenderly, and she stood watching him as he walked off down the hall, carrying her heart with him.

She went into her room and now she no longer fought the bitter grief that was tearing at her heart. *A touch of romance,* she mocked. That was all she had bargained for. Instead she had given her whole heart. But she couldn't have the man she loved unless she was willing to ruin his life.

When she had cried herself to the point of exhaustion, she packed her bags—the lovely bags that she had bought for a carefree vacation. Then she sat down at the small desk and took a sheet of hotel stationery. She had already made up her mind what she must say, so she wrote rapidly:

*Dear Don:*

*I was quite shocked last night to find out that you had taken our little romance so seriously. But perhaps you didn't, after all. Maybe it was only the moonlight. I hope so, because I won't be seeing you any more. It was nice knowing you, but as far as I'm concerned, there was never a chance of it being serious. Have fun, as you may be sure I'll be doing.*

*Katie*

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Every word seemed to tear a fragment from her heart, but there was no other way. She had to let Don think that she was a heartless flirt, not even worth following, otherwise he might go to San Francisco and try to find her. Whether or not he would be able to, she didn't know, but this way she could be sure he wouldn't even bother to look. A girl who had given her lips as she had done that night, without being seriously in love, was certainly not worth a man's time . . . let alone his love.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Rainbow of Romance

BACK IN SAN FRANCISCO her little apartment looked dingier than ever after the luxurious surroundings at Palm City, but to Katie it was blessed sanctuary. She would be back to work by Monday, but the week end she could hide herself like a hurt animal and lick the wounds in her heart.

When Monday came she put on a gay print blouse to brighten up her dark suit and painted her lips a brave shade of red. She was ready for the questions the other girls would be firing at her. Yes, she had had a wonderful time. No, the people at Palm City had not been snobbish. Yes, she did meet a man. What's a vacation without a touch of romance?

"Nothing serious, though?" her best friend, Betsy, asked her a half hour later.

"No, it was just one of those things." She moved quickly down to the other end of the counter, hoping Betsy hadn't noticed the little break in her voice.

When she left the store that night she was glad that her feet ached, and her back was tired, and her head spun. Tonight she would sleep.

That was how life went after that. Work, and then if that wasn't enough, a long walk, no matter how inclement the weather. She tried listening to the radio too, but somehow her mind always wandered off by itself.

She'd go to bed then and fight for the only relief she knew. But even sleep was sometimes denied her.

"What's the matter?" Betsy asked her.

"I—I guess I'm getting a cold."

She knew she was pale and that she had lost weight. A little later she threw a tweed coat over her suit and walked out onto Market Street. A fog was settling over the city. She was glad. Tonight she was going to walk for a long time. She liked to walk in the fog.

A HAND suddenly closed over her arm. A man's hand, strong but wonderfully gentle. Her heart almost stopped beating. That touch had done something to her—something that she had thought the touch of only one man in the world could do . . .

She swung around and looked up at him. It was. It was Don Whitney. He was smiling, a smile that was deeply tender, deeply concerned.

"Katie," he said. "*Katie.*" That was all.

He saw the storm coming, and held her arm more firmly. Come on," he said. "My car is back on Mission Street. Let's not talk until we get there."

Driving slowly along he told her all about it. "I was pretty broken up when I got that note," he was saying. "I could hardly believe you were such a shameless little flirt, but I had your own word for it. When I got it I'd already told Barbara and the folks that we were going to be married, and I didn't have the heart to tell them differently right away. I just said that you had to go home for a while. That was lucky," he added, "or Barbara wouldn't have done it."

"What did she do?" Kate asked.

"She really outsmarted herself," he said with a chuckle. "When she met you

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at the party and questioned you about San Francisco society, she had a pretty good idea you weren't a refugee from the social scene here, as you pretended to be. So without saying anything to me she started checking with her friends here. It didn't take long to find out she was right. Then the dear girl, at her own expense, hired a private investigator to find out just who and what you were. It didn't take long to find out that you were a salesgirl at Marcin's Department Store. "The point is that this morning Barbara came to me triumphantly and told me what she'd found out. Of course she didn't know that you had already walked out of my life, so it looked to her as if you had intended deceiving me right up to the altar. But as soon as I knew the truth I remembered that talk we had that last night, and I thought I knew why you'd left Palm City."

Suddenly he shot the car into a parking place and turned to her. He took her firmly by the shoulders and shook her a little before he brought his lips against hers in a kiss that seemed to bring her heart back to life.

"Now, let's have no more talk like that," he said. "All Dad ever wanted was to be sure I didn't marry a gold-digger, and you've proved you weren't that. The folks are anxiously waiting for me to bring you home."

"Oh," Katie said, "Oh . . ." The last word was a sob.

He took her into his arms and let her cry for a moment. Then he raised her face, wiped away the tears with his own handkerchief, and kissed her still-quivering lips.

No, there would be no more tears. As Don started the car again and headed toward the highway, Katie saw nothing before her but a long unbroken vista of love and happiness.



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## PRECIOUS LITTLE SCHEMER

*(Continued from page 55)*

"I got it in Winter Haven. I drove right back and the idea came when I saw the ring in the shop window. We could pretend we were engaged; that you'd asked me to marry you and go back to East Orange, where we could have a little house with chintz curtains and—"

She paused for breath and gazed up at him so wistfully that Johnny's heart turned completely over.

"How—did you pay for it?" he asked.

"Oh, that!" The wistful look turned into a bright smile and she giggled a little. "The jeweler was at the ski show this morning! He recognized me right away and he said he'd be glad to hold the check for endorsement."

"What check?" He had to be practical.

"Your check. The one your father sent."

She dropped her lashes guiltily, so Johnny was sure she didn't see his amazement.

"But of course," she went on huskily, "you don't have to endorse it. I—I can return the ring. I—"

She choked up and her eyes misted.

Johnny couldn't take it. His arm dropped down the seat back and he drew her gently against him. She was so darned sweet and soft and—smart.

"Look, you precious little schemer!" he said thickly. "You're not returning my engagement ring. I'm endorsing that check and I'm buying another ring—a wedding ring set with little diamonds."

"Y-you mean—"

"I mean," he said with that same thickness in his voice, "that I surrender, my sweet. I love you. I want you to be my wife and do something about those chintz curtains. I—"

"Oh, Johnny—Johnny!"

He had never heard such happiness in a voice. And he had never known that a kiss could be so beautiful. It would be okay with him if this one never stopped.

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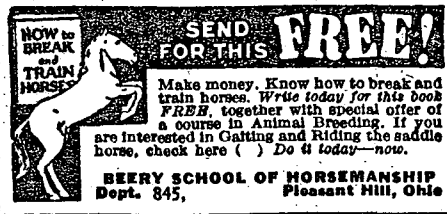


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*(Continued from page 71)*

Linette plucked up courage to ask, "What have the Carringtons got to do with this?"

He was purposely vague. "Oh, we got an anonymous letter at Headquarters couple of days ago. Mentioned them. Pointed the finger at—somebody. You telling me that you and your Cousin Lyn came from Riverdale brought it to my mind."

He walked toward the door, then turned abruptly, and was back to the subject Linette most wanted to avoid. "You say this Jeff Geary and you aren't in love?"

For the second time that day she felt the warm color bathe her cheeks in crimson. She said tartly, "I hardly know Jeff Geary! He's—"

Someone rang the doorbell loudly.

Linette, startled, hurried over and flung it open, as Jeff rushed in, looking quite wild-eyed and frightened.

He gasped, "Linette! It came in on the tele that Miss Linette Joyce had been badly beaten up and clawed by an unknown assailant! I just about burned up the road getting here."

He swept her into his arms, not even noticing the policeman who was observing them with very bright, knowing eyes. He murmured, "I walked out on that conference with the boss. I about died. Darling, what's going on here? Angel, if anything had happened to you . . ."

He held her close in his arms, crooning over her as if she were a broken doll.

The policeman cleared his throat.

"Yes," he said softly. "Yes, Miss Linette Joyce, I can see very clearly that you always tell the truth. You never, never tell a lie! Because I can very plainly see that you and Jeff Geary are just—strangers! You hardly know each other in fact! Well, well!"

He left, leaving them staring after him.

*(To Be Concluded Next Month)*



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## PIN-UP BEAUTY SECRETS

*(Continued from page 81)*

via ingenious lipstick application. Is your mouth too large for beauty? Make it appear smaller by outlining a perfect cupid's bow from center of upper lipline toward corners. Slope the line gradually and stop before reaching natural width of mouth. Use similar technique on lower lip, omitting the perfect cupid's bow.

Are your lips too thin and straight? Give them fullness by enlarging on the curve of the upper lip and placing the heaviest lipstick application on the outer edges of the lipline on both upper and lower lip.

Be sure the lipstick outline is definitely sharp, clear and clean.

Have you a heavy lower lip? Make it look thinner by keeping the color well within the actual lipline. Do not bring the lipstick to the actual edge of lip. A slightly lighter shade of lipstick on the lower lip than on the upper lip also reduces it in appearance.

Do you have a short upper lip? Give it importance by outlining edges neatly. Build up lower lip as much as possible to compensate. Watch your speaking and laughing habits as this type of lip makes it easy to reveal gums.

Is your mouth small with full lips? Take your lipstick and put a tiny cupid's bow curve in reverse on your lower lip. The upper lip should display nice curves, too, but watch any attempt to exaggerate them. Drawing the lipstick well into the corners of the lips gives your mouth width.

Only to look better than you are—not to look like everyone else—should you call beauty camouflage into service. And then watch others perk up at the different "you" you alone created!

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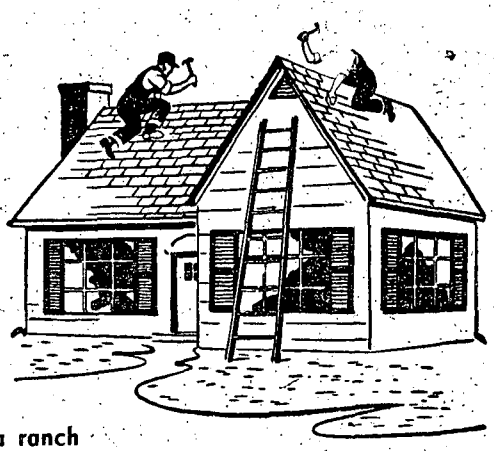

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